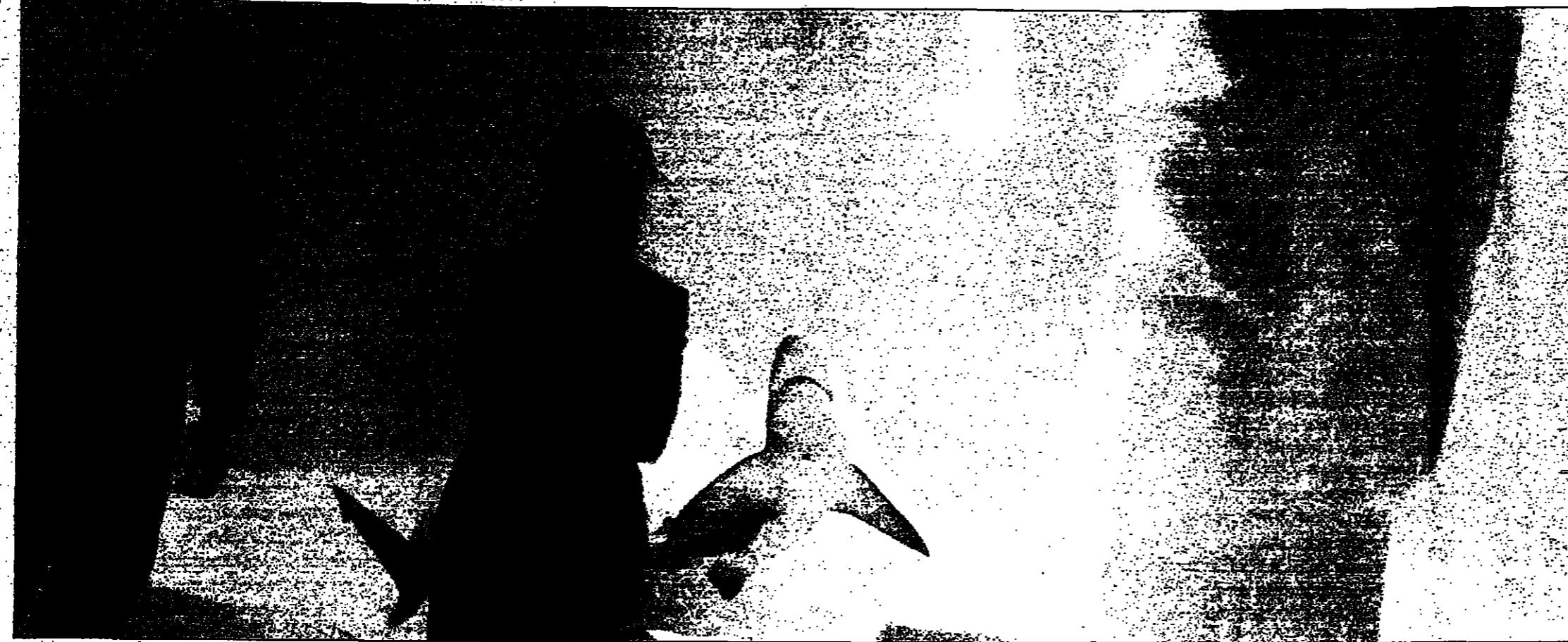




COMMENT
SEX AND THE SINGLE GIRL
SUZANNE MOORE



On one river bank,
MPs snarl farewell;
on the other, a
gentler beast is
circling ...

Early visitors get a bite-sized preview of the new London Aquarium at County Hall, which opens on March 28, while on the opposite side of the Thames, sharp-toothed predators of another kind were savaging the Prime Minister in the Commons
Photograph: John Voos

The poisonous goodbye

Anthony Bevins and Christian Wolmar

The last Prime Minister's question time of this Parliament ended in deep and angry bitterness yesterday as John Major, Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown traded poisonous personal insults over the cash-for-questions inquiry.

With the Prime Minister blocking any further investigation into the main sleaze allegations against Tory MPs until after the election, the Labour leader accused him of leaving a stain on Parliament.

Mr Major replied that his opponents were engaged in a political stunt to divert attention from Wednesday's unemployment figures which fell to a six-year low.

But he then concluded the exchanges with Mr Blair by running through a breath-taking list of Labour double-standards that delighted the Conservative benches, and enraged the Opposition.

Earlier, Michael Heseltine set the tone for the day, telling BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme

Tories could still win, voters believe

Most voters think that the Conservatives can still win the election, according to today's *Independent/Harris* opinion poll, writes John Menzies.

Despite a buoyant 27-point lead for Labour in our poll, more than two-thirds of voters - 69 per cent - say the Tories are in the bag and that the Tories have "no chance".

Labour's lead in our poll has increased by two percentage points since last week, and by six points since the launch of our election countdown series two weeks ago.

While only 17 per cent think the election is "certainly not over yet", half of the electorate - 52 per cent - say "while Labour are favourites

there is still a slight chance" that the Tories can win.

A further 20 per cent think that Tony Blair has the election in the bag and that the Tories have "no chance".

Labour's lead in our poll has increased by two percentage points since last week, and by six points since the launch of our election

countdown series two weeks ago.

Labour now has an average 24-point lead in the six

main polls, compared with 18 points before winning the Wirral South by-election three weeks ago.

The *Independent/Harris* Poll

Labour.....56%
Con.....29%
Lib Dem.....10%
Others.....5%

■ Harris Research interviewed 1,016 adults face-to-face in their homes between 14 and 17 March



and even Jan Duncan Smith, a loyal Conservative member of the committee, said only that it was "unlikely" they would have enough time.

The Labour leader said Mr Major had made an unequivocal promise last October, to do all he could to have the investigation findings published. With Labour MPs bawling "Sleaze, sleaze" at the Tory benches, Mr Blair said: "Has this Parliament not ended as it began, by a government breaking its word?"

If you fail to have this report published ... it will leave a stain on the character of your Government that will only be erased by a new government with a fresh mandate that will restore confidence in our public life for good," Mr Major shouted back.

"The stain, if stain there will be, is on a Labour frontbench that have smeared and smeared again. You have traded in double standards from the moment you took up office."

The offer was rejected out of hand by the Prime Minister, who feared that if the report was delivered to the committee, it would be leaked "in a prejudicial way", against the interests

of the House and of natural justice.

With the support of some Tory members of the committee, the Prime Minister also said it was "improbable" in the extreme" that there would be enough time to complete an investigation before Parliament was finally dissolved on 8 April.

That was not Labour's view,

refuses to comply with the code of practice on party funding who calls for party openness but won't publish the secret funds of your own office, who attacks share options but takes money from millionaires for your own party, and attacks businessmen and asks them to fund things for you, who flew Concorde and failed to declare it, who has a Deputy Leader who spends a weekend at a five-star hotel and doesn't declare it, and who flies to the other side of the world to do newspaper deals and never admits to them. If there's any

double standards they sit there, on the Opposition benches."

Joining the fray, Mr Ashdown asked the Prime Minister: "Are you now to be the only person who will use a technicality to stand in the way of truth?"

Mr Major replied coldly: "You end as pious and pompous as you have been throughout this Parliament."

Earlier, the Standards and Privileges Committee issued an interim report, which had been the source of great expectation - but proved to be a damp squib.

INSIDE

Election countdown, pages 6, 7, 8
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French freshen up le Big Mac

John Lichfield
Paris

In the pitiless Franco-American war which rages (according to some) for cultural domination of the globe, one side may be about to score an important victory. But which side?

McDonald's, synonymous with American culture on six continents, will today launch a new burger - for the French market, and the French palate, only. Betraying the American heritage of ketchup and mayonnaise-impregnated sweetness, the new burger - the McDeluxe - will be based on the principles of French cuisine.

It will have a steak haché (hamburger) at the centre, but it will also have a "delicate" old mustard-and-pepper sauce, a slice of cheddar cheese, fresh onion and a whole lettuce leaf. The aim is to revitalise slow-seller sales in France by appealing to French adult preferences for meat foods with complicated tastes. Although McDonald's opened 100 new restaurants in France last year, bringing its total to more than 500, the sales figures of individual outlets

have fallen. The McDeluxe will sell for just over £2, only a little more than a Big Mac.

The title is already used by McDonald's in other countries, but the French recipe is exclusive to France.

Its launch today may precipitate a Franco-Belgian-American burger taste war. Quick, the Belgian fast-food chain which is second in the French market to McDonald's, will respond on Monday with a new "hamburger on toast".

Mark Watkins, an analyst of the French hotel and restaurant market, says: McDonald's has been affected by the general slow-down in the French economy. Beyond that, he told *Le Monde*, there is a world-wide "phenomenon of boredom" with fast food, which can only be partly answered by juggling with new recipes. "They are also going to have to do something about the atmosphere. Children go mostly for the ambience."

In the US, McDonald's has acted on slowing sales by slashing prices. Its French operation seems, however, to have absorbed French cultural influences other than culinary ones.

QUICKLY

Gulf troops claim
New evidence has emerged that British troops in the Gulf were exposed against their will to vaccinations which were unlicensed and untested. The claims will compound the scandal over the dangerous use of organophosphate pesticides in the Gulf.

Page 4

Cloning ban call
Cloning of human beings should be clearly outlawed by the next Parliament, according to an all-party Select Committee report rushed out ahead of the election campaign.

Palestine riot
Palestinian demonstrators bashed rocks at Israeli troops in Bethlehem and Jewish settlers moved into a Palestinian district in East Jerusalem yesterday, further damaging prospects for a peace agreement to end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Moscow hotline
Rivalry with France led Britain to press for a special hotline to Moscow in 1966, previously classified files show. Page 13

Finns cater for a historic summit

Phil Reeves
Helsinki



Takeaway: Clinton gets lift from a catering truck

Bill Clinton's handlers could scarcely have handed a greater gift to the scoffing wags of late-night American television comedy. The President, a notorious foodie, touched down in Helsinki only to be offloaded into an airline catering truck. He came to make history, but arrived like a consignment of frozen chicken wings.

"This must be the most

bizarre arrival of any foreign

politician on Finnish soil that we

have ever witnessed," said Rauno

Finland's commentator.

"He has now left the catering

wagon ... and is being slowly

wheeled down the red carpet

and is shaking hands with mem-

bers of the Finnish govern-

ment". You would have thought

someone would at least have

pinned a US flag across the tell-

tales FinnAir catering logo.

The band was cancelled, be-

cause Bill might have had to

stand, a feat beyond him,

though he had been working out

in mid-air on parallel bars. Air

Force One has its own gym.

super-slick press operation in Helsinki. Usually cagey top officials have been drafted in to talk about immigration, freedom of information, relations with the West and crime.

Cleverly, the Russians have set up camp in the same building as the world's television companies; the President's spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, only has to walk out of his door and be surrounded by lenses. Outclassed, US officials - for years the masters of spin - have been left scrambling to catch up.

Nor is it only a two-way con-

test. The Finns have seized on the summit to promote the 80th anniversary of their independence from Russia. Non-aligned though they are, this is not entirely friendly turf for Mr Yeltsin.

Remarkably, Finland has the only Latin news radio service on the planet. As Mr Yeltsin and Mr Clinton sit down today, the following words will drift across the airwaves: "Président Bill Clinton et Boris Yeltsin in Finnia convenient ..."

Leaders talk, page 12

Follow
the
ball...



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2 news

Significant shorts

Water company offers £10 as goodwill after bug scare

Households forced to boil their tap water for 16 days following a contamination scare are to receive just £10 each as a "goodwill payment".

Nearly a million people, in Hertfordshire and north-west London, will be given £3m in compensation by the French-owned Three Valleys Water. The boil-water notice was issued as a precautionary measure after low-levels of cryptosporidium, a microscopic parasite causing severe diarrhoea, were located in water samples.

Sharon Doe, senior researcher at the Consumers' Association, said the £10 payment was "plainly ludicrous". But a spokesman for Three Valleys said it believed that their customers would be happy with the payment and encouraged them to write to the company's insurance department if they had a further claim. **Nicole Veash**

Bootleggers cheat taxman of £20m

A "highly organised" gang of bootleggers cheated the taxman out of more than £20m in Excise duty in just a few months, a court heard yesterday.

After spiritting "massive quantities" of alcoholic drinks out of bonded warehouses, on the understanding that the loads were destined for the Continent, the gang re-routed the drinks to warehouses and cash-and-carries across Britain, using bargaining prices to flood the market, it was claimed.

Kwabu Hare, 41, and his 48-year-old brother Sohan, Tofail Ahmed, 52, Alex Windsor, 43, Sunil Gopalan, 32, and Anthony Mills, 48, all from the London and Essex areas, deny one count of conspiracy to cheat the public revenue between January and August 1995 and one alleging conspiracy to defraud. In addition, Ahmed has pleaded not guilty to three counts of fraudulent evasion of duty.

Inquiry into man's death in custody

An inquiry has been launched after a 22-year-old man was found dead in a police cell, it was disclosed yesterday.

The body of Craig Vose was found at Pilgrim Street police station in Newcastle upon Tyne on Wednesday after he was arrested for alleged shoplifting in the city-centre on Tuesday.

Further tests are being conducted to find the cause of death. Mr Vose lived in a single men's hostel in the city but he was originally from Aberdeen, said a police spokesman, who added that the case had been routinely referred, voluntarily, to the Police Complaints Authority.

Children's refuge may close

A unique refuge for abused children could close in 10 days following the Government's decision to withdraw lifeline funding, leaving hundreds of needy children homeless.

The shelter, located at a secret address in London, is one of only four similar "safe houses" in the country, and provides emergency accommodation for runaways under 16. The Department of Health, which has refused to continue paying £100,000-a-year to fund the project, says local authorities should foot the bill.

Esther Rantzen, left, chair of Childline, said: "If desperate young people call us ... we refer them to this refuge. The West murders are still fresh in our minds." **Nicole Veash**

Diver wins £266,000 damages

A diver was awarded £266,000 damages at the High Court yesterday for an accident which ended his career as an offshore worker in the North Sea. Philip Zammitt, 39, from Southampton, was left dangling helplessly in 85 metres of water for 40 minutes after developing cramp during a six-hour dive. Mr Justice Garland ordered Stena Offshore to pay the damages to compensate Mr Zammitt for loss of earnings because he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and developed a fear of water and diving.

Supervisors on the Stena Constructor, Mr Zammitt's support vessel, should have realised the dangers and called off the operation, said Benjamin Browne QC, representing Mr Zammitt.

Requiem for a Friesian cow

A dairy farmer is to record an album in honour of a Friesian cow she stands to lose under the selective cull programme.

Kerry Swain, 37, of Llandeilo, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, is planning to record a 12-track compact disc for Tara the cow. Part of the cost of producing the album, due for release in May and which will include songs by Eternal and Bette Midler, will be funded by Unigate. All profits will go to the charity Rural Outreach.

... and the search for sexy sheep

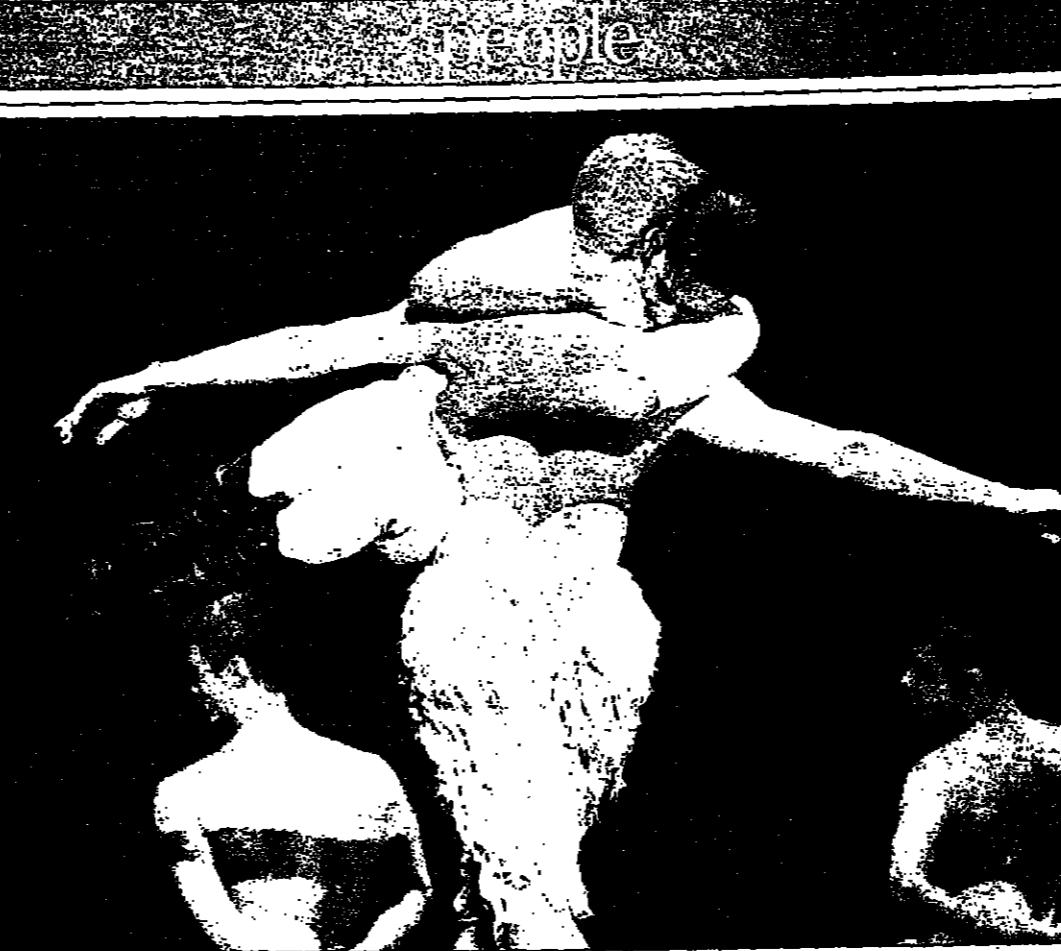
Police are investigating the theft of eight inflatable sheep taken from an adult shop. The blow-up sheep, worth £15 each, were stolen from the Playtime store in Aberkenfig, south Wales.

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Adam Cooper who led the dynamic and innovative gender-swapping *Swan Lake* (pictured above) was yesterday rewarded with an award for the Outstanding Individual Performance in Ballet, writes *David Lister*.

The former Royal Ballet dancer announced recently he was leaving the company to take the *Swan Lake* production, put on by the contemporary dance troupe Adventures In Motion

or a stardom rarely realised by classical ballet dancers. His award yesterday was given at the Evening Standard Ballet, Opera and Classical Music Awards.

A special award was also made at the London ceremony to conductor Valery Gergiev in recognition of the outstanding quality of his London concerts with both the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Mariinsky orchestras.

Chalker to quit politics for independent role in Africa

Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, the Minister for Overseas Development, will resign after the general election, regardless of the result.

In her resignation letter to the Prime Minister, Lady Chalker said she was "deeply committed to continuing development work in Africa and now feel that I should do this independently".

She continued: "This is in no way a sudden decision but confirms my long held wish which we discussed last year."

In his reply, John Major said he respected her wish "but with great regret".

Praising her contribution to the Government since 1979 as "enormous across a range of Departments", the Prime Minister said Lady Chalker had brought a "particularly effective combination of dedication, hard-headed analysis and a genuine compassion".

Lady Chalker became the Conservative MP for Wallasey in 1974.



Baroness Chalker: 'Dedication and genuine compassion'

She was appointed Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in January 1986.

In June of the following year, she was made a Privy Counsellor and became Minister for Overseas Development.

in July 1989 with responsibilities for overseas development administration, sub-Saharan Africa and Commonwealth affairs.

She lost her seat at the last election to Labour's Angela Eagle, but a life peerage allowed her to continue her overseas development work.

In December, she announced £20m of aid for Ethiopia and a further £10m to the Palestinians in January.

Speaking to the CBI earlier this year, Lady Chalker announced an initiative to enable the private sector and the ODA to work more closely. She has also argued for the need for the European Union to consider the impact that all its policies have on its work with developing countries.

Her Labour shadow, Clare Short, said yesterday that Lady Chalker had done a good job while getting little support from her government over the main overseas development issues.

Matthew Brace

US state battles with French fashion designer

Who owns the name Montana? The American state says nobody, despite the claims of the French designer Claude Montana who has registered exclusive rights to the word for certain products.

Marc Racicot, the Governor of Montana, has asked the US Commerce Department for a ruling that no one can restrict use of a generic word that refers to a geographic location. In a letter to Bruce Lehman, commissioner of patents and trademarks, the governor said he is concerned that the exclusivity claim of Claude Montana (pictured) could affect hundreds of Montana businesses that use the state name to identify themselves or their products.

"I am seriously concerned about this situation and, on behalf of the Montana businesses and citizens who call Montana home, challenge the right of any individual or business to claim exclusivity or use of the name 'Montana' for any product or service," he wrote in the letter, released on Wednesday.

The issue arose when Tom and Ann Dooling of Dillon, Montana, tried to register a trademark for the name of their clothing business "Montana Knits". A New York law firm representing Claude Montana objected, saying the designer had sole right to use the name on a variety of goods from colognes and shoes to gowns and jeans.

If federal officials rule against it, the state may go to law.



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Lottery winner quizzed in theft inquiry

A millionaire Lottery winner has been arrested for allegedly stealing paving stones from a former neighbour, police said yesterday.

Ken Pattison, who scooped a £1.2m jackpot in September 1995, was arrested by South Yorkshire police on Tuesday night and questioned about alleged thefts from run-down houses in Dalton, Rotherham, where his old house is being bulldozed as part of a regeneration scheme. He was not charged and was released on bail while inquiries continue.

Mr Pattison, 44, who now lives in a £64,000 detached house in the same area, said: "It is all a load of rubbish. I know I am innocent, but there are a lot of people jealous of me." He and his wife have refused to succumb to the trappings of wealth and have a modest lifestyle. Their first holiday abroad together - in Spain - was won in a raffle after the Lottery win.

HEALTH

Stroke risk from cocaine use

Cocaine users run the risk of suffering a stroke from their habit, doctors warned yesterday. Two young men have been admitted to the Whittington Hospital, north London, in the last two years with strokes following cocaine use, and both were left partially paralysed. Professor Griffith Edwards, of the Maudsley Hospital, south London, and editor of the journal *Addiction*, said: "Stroke is a recognised complication of cocaine use ... It is probably produced by a surge in blood pressure."



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HEALTH

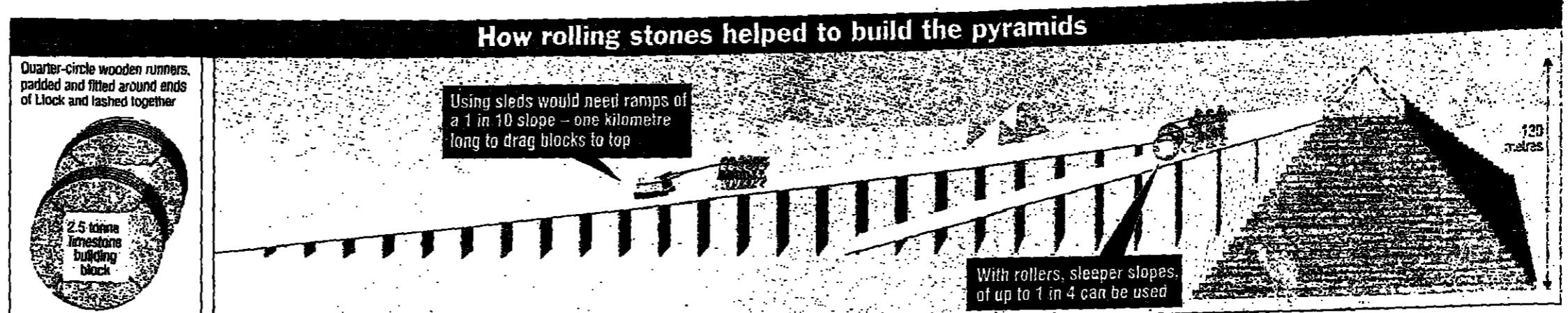
news

Rolling stones could solve riddle

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

How did they do that? As far as building the pyramids goes, the standard answer has for years been: by putting the 2.5 ton stones onto sledges and dragging them.

But now a Cambridge civil



engineer has come up with a (literally) revolutionary explanation: that the individual stones were encased in two circular, hoop-like wooden rollers, one at each end, and then rolled from the quarries and up ramps to the construction point. The same "rolling stones" method might have helped transport

those used to build Stonehenge, suggests Dr Dick Parry, formerly at the University's engineering department. To back up his pyramid hypothesis, Dr Parry has reconstructed full-scale models and shown that with the rollers, three men can pull a stone which would otherwise need the efforts of 20 men.

The stones can also be rolled up ramps as steep as 1 in 4, whereas friction makes it impossible to pull a sledge up more than 1 in 10. Using sledges to build the pyramids, which are more than 130m high, would have required solid ramps a kilometre long - impossible given the site. With the rolling

stones, the ramps could be much shorter and more easily moved. That would be important in building a structure of 2.3 million limestone blocks weighing an average of 2.5 tons. "The logistics mean that over 20 years you would be quarrying and placing one stone every two minutes of the daylight hours," said Dr Parry, who gave a talk last night in Cambridge as part of National Science Week. "You need not labour-intensive brute force, but a high-tech solution."

His suggestion also helps to answer the mystery of cradle-like objects discovered by archaeologists in the 1880s. These were thought to have been used to "rock" the stones upwards. A number of reference books say that sledges were used after the pyramids to move large objects such as statues. But Dr Parry points out that those were one-off operations, where speed was immaterial. Despite their permanence, speed was essential for the pyramids.

MoD rebuked over sick Gulf veterans

Ian Burrell

The Ministry of Defence was warned yesterday that its treatment of sick Gulf veterans may have seriously undermined attempts to persuade future generations to join the armed services.

In a highly critical report, the Commons Defence Committee was scathing of the MoD's cover-up of the use of dangerous organophosphate pesticides in the war. The cross-party committee of MPs castigated Nicholas Soames, the Armed Forces Minister, and Earl Howe, the Junior Defence Minister, for their failure to take a more "pro-active and inquisitive" role in the affair.

The report also raised the prospect of ex-gratia compensation payments for sick veterans who can prove they were exposed to OP pesticides in the war.

More than 1,100 Gulf veterans are claiming that organophosphate poisoning

might be one of the causes behind Gulf War Syndrome. The War Pensions Agency was criticised by the committee for its "unacceptable" delays in dealing with claims by veterans.

The MPs blamed the "intrinsic defensiveness and insularity" of the MoD for the pesticides cover-up but called for an amnesty for officials who took part.

The RAF's Special Investigation Bureau is questioning service personnel and civil servants on how Parliament was misled and the MPs are anxious that the inquiry does not lead to a further cover-up. "The overriding priority in this case should be the early disclosure of information which could assist ill Gulf veterans," said the report.

The abandonment of disciplinary proceedings for anything less than serious misconduct might be justified if it would facilitate such disclosure," it added.

The Gulf Veterans and Families Association criticised the

Troops used untested vaccine

New evidence has emerged that British troops in the Gulf were exposed, against their will, to vaccinations which were unlicensed and untested, writes Ian Burrell.

The American manufacturers of a plague vaccine have denied that the batch cited on the medical records of British soldiers was ever given to the UK authorities. It said the vaccine was to be given on a named patient basis only. Furthermore, nerve agent protection (pyridostigmine bromide) tablets which troops took every day during the war were not licensed until August 1993, more than two years after the conflict.

The new evidence, which has been passed to Earl Howe, the Defence Minister, will com-

ound the scandal over the use of organophosphate pesticides in the Gulf.

Sick veterans say that they have been assured by the Ministry of Defence that the inoculations they were given were licensed and obtained from regular sources. Yet Miles Inc, the American manufacturer of the Cutter plague vaccine identified on the medical cards of British troops, denied that the named batch, 10H03A, was sent to the UK authorities. The company said its sole customer for the vaccine was the US government, which did not use plague vaccine in the Gulf.

Plague vaccine was licensed in the US and Canada but not in the UK, where it was available on a named-patient basis only.

The MoD maintains that troops were given vaccinations on the basis of voluntary informed consent, but veterans said they were given little choice in the matter.

Larry Cannock, a medic with the Royal Army Medical Corps, said in a sworn statement: "I was told we had to have inoculations and that they had published the order on a notice board saying it was a court martial offence to refuse."

The MoD said: "The Government took all available steps to offer protection to its personnel [and] drew on the best professional advice."

CJD families seek inquiry on link with BSE

Clare Garner

The families of the people who have died from the human form of mad cow disease yesterday called for a full public inquiry into the link between "new variant" Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and BSE.

In a question and answer session at the end of an emotional one-day conference at the

University of Warwick, organised by the CJD Support Network, families and friends of victims were given a chance to grill the professionals.

"Do you think it's right for a government to monitor itself on this problem or do you think there should be a public inquiry?" asked one woman. Silence. "Is there someone up there who can answer our ques-

tion," she persisted. Eventually Professor John Collinge, honorary consultant in neurology at St. Mary's Hospital and the only speaker who dared sit in the firing line, mustered a reply: "I think there is a growing case for having an independent food agency, certainly," he said.

The day was designed as an opportunity for carers of CJD victims to hear about the latest

research - and about 200 people travelled across the country to do so. Among the speakers was Gerard Callaghan who reduced the auditorium to tears with his account of caring for his brother Maurice, when he was dying of CJD. He spoke of how his parents had sat at Maurice's bedside "longing to change places in the bed, as they felt it should be, and not watching helplessly as their child slipped cruelly from their care."

The inevitable question "should we eat beef" arose - most people had chosen to avoid the beef lasagne at lunchtime. Professor Collinge replied that we could be "fairly confident" in eating beef, adding hastily: "That's not saying that it can't occur in a one-in-a-million chance."

Minister gives go-ahead to widen M25

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

A plan to widen part of the M25 to 10 and 12 lanes has been given the go-ahead by John Watts, the Roads Minister, after a Department of Transport official letter slip that the scheme was essential to service the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow Airport.

Mr Watts' announcement will mean that the M25 between junction 12 (M3) and junction

15 (M4) will become Britain's widest road. The scheme does not require planning permission because it is being carried out within the boundaries of the existing road. The Labour party has said it will review the plans should it win the election.

In April 1995, Brian Mawhinney, the then Secretary of State for Transport, announced that he was shelving a scheme to widen this part of the M25 to 14 lanes but announced that the

department was examining the 10 and 12 lane scheme as a possible substitute.

Chris Fisher, chairman of the local campaign against the proposal, said: "It is outrageous that ministers continue to reject pleas for a public inquiry into the scheme for the widest motorway in Europe and to ignore 4,000 objections lodged against it." Mr Fisher claimed that the motorway would be full by the year 2010.

Mr Watts' announcement was made just after news emerged that for the first time, the Department of Transport had admitted that the plan to build Terminal Five, currently in the middle of Britain's longest planning inquiry, was dependent on widening the M25.

Thomas Dockerty, a Highways Agency official giving evidence to the Terminal Five inquiry last month, said that the construction of the new terminal



election countdown

For most of my adult life the benches on the Tory side of the House have been much better populated than those on the other side. Sometimes it has seemed as though they simply breed more, reproducing themselves election after election with a creepy fecundity.

Many of them, individually, are pleasant, attentive and serious. But collectively they have become oily, smug, fractious, venal, ruthless, hectoring, selfish, bovine, inert, unthinking, self-satisfied, shameless, sanguine and – in the widest sense – corrupt. They are no longer connected to government, but concreted into it. With any reforming impulse long dead, their best and brightest have been ignored, marginalised or sent to serve in Hong Kong. Gradually their world has

DAVID AARONOVITCH

Time and negligence takes its inevitable toll

become one of influence and patronage, of dinners and limousines, of promises and phone calls, of hangers-on and back-slappers. Time and negligence have intertwined and entangled their personal interests with the interests of the nation. Year after year they have sat

together, simulating each other's organs of prejudice, or stabbing each other in the back – half-party, half-dynasty: the Borgia Party.

How their leader has tried to save them from themselves! And what has it cost him? It was Scrupulous John, who

had set up the Nolan Committee (as he had the Scott Inquiry) in a moment of crisis caused by a collapse of confidence in standards. It was Honest John who bought time by assuring the world that he would strain every sinew to expedite publication of the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, Sir Gordon Downey's report into cash-for-questions. It was Hapless John who had once more failed to deliver, because what he had promised was either impossible, or (when push came to shove) politically damaging.

So, when a despatch box-carrying Tony Blair demanded yesterday that the PM pull his finger out and get the thing printed (hoping that he would do no such thing), Major's reply was bound to be inadequate – starting with obfuscation ("complex report ...

thousands of pages of evidence ... time to consider ... time to respond ...") and ending in an attack on the Opposition that was so brazen that the very worst on his own benches looked cheered by it. The leader of the party of Neil Hamilton, Asil Nadir and John Latsis: the party that chose to shoot the messenger over cash-for-questions; the party of effortless transition from Cabinet room boardroom – the Borgia Party leader attacked his opponents for their fondness for gold and lark's tongues.

If this was a depressing performance, how much more depressing to consider that – only minutes earlier, we had seen one hot-tip for the succession in full flow. Michael Howard had been "answering" questions as only he can.

"Brazen" does not describe the Home Secretary fairly, or do justice to the exceptional fluency – the flawlessness – of his delivery. He is adamantine, consisting of a series of pure, impervious surfaces, always reflecting light away from his glittering facets, and never, ever absorbing it. Jack Straw was "the burglar's friend", the Leader of the Opposition had "sought to excuse certain types of shoplifting and pickpocketing", instead of "inculcating a sense of right and wrong into our children".

You may think this ludicrous, but Cesare nodded and Lucretia fingered her ring. With John out of the way and Michael installed, the Borgias can send all their old scores re-group, replenish their stock of hellebore and sharpen their silences, then start breeding again.

MPs take a break before campaign

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister may be "hitting the ground running" with his election campaign, but some of his MPs are preparing to fight the elections on the beaches or the ski slopes until after the Easter break.

While John Major and Tony Blair are preparing to enter the second week of their election campaign, many voters will see no sign of their MPs in their constituencies.

At least one minister has told his constituency association he will take a short break in the Alps. "You can see too much of your constituents," he has told his friends. Other favourite destinations for MPs over Easter are city breaks on the Eurostar train to Paris and – although it will not appeal to the Euro-sceptics – Brussels.

Others are preparing for a short holiday in Britain before getting down to the business of winning their seats. "I am going to my in-laws with my wife for a few days, and I will be reading lots of novels," said one ministerial aide.

The MPs fear the six-week campaign to polling day on 1 May – the longest this century – could backfire if they begin now. "It's like door-to-door selling. You don't want to talk yourself out of a sale. If we start too soon, it will turn off the voters," said a whip.

But many MPs are also worried about exceeding their allowance, of about £7,500 for election expenses, before polling day. They fear they could be challenged by the minor parties, including Sir James Goldsmith's Referendum Party.

One MP said he was staying around Parliament next week, although the House will be in

recess, to enable him to write letters on House of Commons notepaper to constituents who have signed petitions in the past. All the cost of the postage will be born by the taxpayer.

Once the MP starts campaigning, the cost of the postage would have to come out of his election expenses. "The moment I start campaigning, the clock starts ticking on our expenses. So I'm not starting until after Easter," he said.

Most MPs are holding back until 1 April before hitting the streets with campaign leaflets. The party manifestos will be published around 3 April, creating a lull in the phoney war next week. The only exception will be in the marginal seats where all the parties are already campaigning hard.

However, to avoid election expenses being triggered, they are campaigning under the cover of "constituency surveys", until their candidates are formally adopted and up and running after Easter. One MP said: "Providing we don't mention the name of the candidate, we won't incur election expenses."

Whitehall is also likely to be in limbo next week. Civil servants were told this week by Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary, not to indulge in party political campaigning. They have been warned that from the moment Mr Major called the election, they have not to allow ministers to take any executive decisions which may bind the next government.

Sir Robin also briefed all the heads of the Whitehall press offices to reinforce the message. Although the wheels of Government are kept turning, ministers have stopped operating through the Whitehall machinery and will be making the most of Easter break.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

SCORING THE EXCHANGES

John Major
8/10

Tony Blair
8/10

Major was well prepared to allege Labour shenanigans in response to Blair's call for the immediate publication of the Downey report. He did so with force and passion.

Blair was equally sure of himself, putting the argument for a later publication, and a continuing cash-for-questions investigation with equal force and passion.

BLAIR'S ATTACK

Blair said that the report by Sir Gordon Downey, Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, could and should be seen before Parliament was dissolved. Major said the report was just the start of a new process of examination by the Standards and Privileges Committee. Blair reminded Major that he had said earlier that he wanted to see the report before it was published, and told Major that his stance did not look like "can't" but "won't". Major replied with a torrent of allegations of Labour sleaze, and said Blair was only using the affair to try to hide recent good news about the economy.

THEMES OF THE DAY

The timing of the prorogation of Parliament (Chris Mullin, Lab, Sunderland South; Blair; Paddy Ashdown)

Prices of privatised electricity in the Southern region (Sir James Spicer, C, Devon West)

The economy (Winston Churchill, C, Davyhulme)

GOOD DAY

David Shaw (C, Dover) led Tory backbench critics. Eventually, the Speaker could take no more, and Shaw (majority 833) was reprimanded on what could be his penultimate day in the House.

QUIP OF THE DAY

Dennis Skinner (Lab, Bassetlaw), who piped up in response to one of the day's two creeps. According to Spicer, if Major visited Dorset, he could pass on "the good news that as from Tuesday they've had 11 per cent cut over the course of the last nine months in their electricity bills". "Don't go there by train," advised Skinner.

UNANSWERED QUESTION

Churchill: "May I thank my Rt Hon Friend and his Government on behalf of my Manchester constituents for making this country the best functioning economy of all of Europe."

Compiled by Ben Summers



Political digest: A visitor to Politico's enjoying one of the cafe's election specials yesterday

Photograph: Brian Harris

Coffee shop politics sound a modern echo of Swift

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Kenneth Baker, the former Tory minister, has popped into Politico's Westminster's newest bookshop and cafe, to buy a left-wing post card.

Electon '97. This choice is no choice," runs the slogan above a picture of two identical candidates labelled "Tweedlefat" and "Tweedlecon". "Record a protest. Spoil your ballot paper."

Not that the former Conservative Home Secretary is endorsing the sentiment, of course. He just collects political cartoons. Mr Baker spots a copy of *Thatcher for Beginners* and is sipping with giggles.

"I don't think you're a beginner," the owner, Iain Dale, tells him, and he departs with his waiting card clutching his postcard and a second-hand book of Vicky cartoons which he has impulse-bought.

Above the door of Politico's is a motto, peed by Jonathan Swift in 1711: "It is a folly of too many to mistake the echo of a London coffee-house for the echo of the kingdom."

Despite the warning, Mr Dale has set out to discover how the election will go. Since the former lobbyist opened his shop a month ago after seeing similar outfits in Washington, 500 of his customers have voted both for a prime minister and for a

government. Tony Blair is the prime minister, and Margaret Thatcher has come in second. John Major has limped home fifth, just behind Geri from the Spice Girls. Among the parties, Labour is running at 46 points, 10 points ahead of the Conservatives, while the Liberal Democrats are trailing on 11.

Mr Dale hopes to do brisk business during the election, and adds that his shop has comfortably surpassed its sales targets in the first month. The

pubbers have some surprising doosters" and beef-free "Douglas Hogg".

Not everyone has come here to discuss politics, though. Two female civil servants have popped in for a sneaky look at *Hidden Agendas* by Derek Lewis, the sacked former head of the Prison Service. Now they are upstairs having a bit of lunch. Are they talking about the election? "Oh, no," they reply. "We're bitching about our colleagues. Isn't that what people generally do over lunch?"



The man behind the Politico choice: Peter Mandelson (standing, centre of group on right) and helpers at Tony Blair's morning press conference yesterday

Photograph: David Rose

Ten Tories who must wait until after the election to see if their names are in the clear



Sleaze report casts shadow over MPs

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

The short report from the Standards and Privileges Committee issued yesterday cleared 15 MPs of any wrongdoing, but leaves eight Tory MPs – and two others who are standing down – going into the election without having cleared their names.

Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, stressed that in his interim report, which he only issued because of the outcry over the delay in the publication of the full report, that "no conclusions should be drawn about the conduct of the remaining MPs still under investigation.

The report exonerated 11 Tories whose election funds received money from the lobbyist Ian Greer, who had been given the funds by Mohammed Al Fayed, owner of Harrods, mostly for their 1987 and 1992 election campaigns. Three Labour MPs – Chris, Smith, Doug Hoyle, and Gwyneth Dunwoody – also received money from Mr Greer, together with one Liberal Democrat, Alan Beith. The Tories are: Robert Atkins, Vivian Bendall, John Bowes, Sir Graham Bright, Sir Anthony Durant, David Mellor, Michael Portillo, David Shaw, Sir Malcolm Thornton, Sir Gerald Vaughan and Sir John Wheeler.

Sir Gordon says that the rules current at the 1987 and 1992 elections, required registration of donations – in the Members' Interest Register – where these exceeded 25 per cent of the member's election expenses. The implication is that the amounts received by these MPs were below this limit.

The remaining MPs include the five which have been most closely associated with Mr Greer: Sir Michael Grylls – who is not standing – Michael Brown, Sir Andrew Bowden, Neil Hamilton and Sir Neil Hamilton.

All are alleged either to have asked cash for questions or not declared interests. Mr Hamilton has denied receiving money for asking questions in the House. Tim Smith, who received

£18,000 from Mr Greer, said in a statement: "Although Mr Al Fayed paid me fees, there was never any suggestion of specific amount per question and it cannot, therefore, be described as cash for questions". In January 1995, I told the executive council of Beaconsfield Constituency Conservative Association that the total amount was in the order of £18,000.

The report, agreed by the Standards and Privileges Committee on Wednesday night, and which only consisted of three paragraphs, says that the MP's regret that Sir Gordon has not managed to complete his full report in time, saying this was because of the complexity of the web of accusations that have been made against certain members.

The two others still being investigated are Sir Peter Hordern, who is standing down and who is alleged to have received money in exchange for asking questions about London arms deals, and Lady Olga Maitland, who is alleged to have received "commissions" from Mr Greer.

Former members of Parliament who are also alleged to have received money from Mr Greer include Lady Chalker and Lord Moynihan, but Sir Gordon has no jurisdiction over them. The report, agreed by the Standards and Privileges Committee on Wednesday night, and which only consisted of three paragraphs, says that the MP's regret that Sir Gordon has not managed to complete his full report in time, saying this was because of the complexity of the web of accusations that have been made against certain members.

It also appears to give succour to the Government's argument that there was not time to have a proper discussion of the report by arguing that even if Sir Gordon had managed to complete his inquiry, there may have been the need for "further hearings" which could take "considerable time".

election countdown

McAliskey aims to take on McGuinness



Martin McGuinness: Receiving lion's share of attention

David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

The Northern Ireland election campaign flared into life yesterday with the announcement that Roisin McAliskey is planning to stand for parliament in the pivotal Mid-Ulster seat.

Mrs McAliskey, who is eight months' pregnant, is being held on remand in Holloway prison in north London. She is contesting a German request for her extradition to face questioning about an IRA bombing attack in Osnabrück.

The move has stirred up a number of ancestral ghosts. In 1969, Miss McAliskey's mother, Bernadette, caused a sensation when she won the same seat as a nationalist unity candidate and became the youngest-ever MP of Westminster.

In 1981, while highly active as a champion of republican prisoners' rights during the traumatic hunger strikes period,



Bernadette McAliskey: Urges candidates to stand aside

Mrs McAliskey was shot and almost killed by loyalist gunmen at her home. In the same year the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands was elected MP for the neighbouring Fermanagh & South Tyrone constituency.

The name of McAliskey has thus been associated with some of the most notable events of the

Troubles. In this instance the intervention has caused a stir, thrown the result in Mid-Ulster into uncertainty, and made inevitable a tense period of stand-offs and mounting pressures.

The seat is currently held by the Democratic Unionist MP, the Rev William McCrea, but since it has a nationalist majority the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Féin are campaigning hard to replace him. The SDLP candidate, Dennis Haughey, is one of party leader John Hume's closest aides and one of the party's best known intellectuals.

But his candidacy has been eclipsed by the fact that Sinn Féin has moved one of its best-known leaders, Martin McGuinness, into the constituency. The high-profile republican has received the lion's share of publicity and public attention.

Announcing her daughter's candidacy, Mrs McAliskey asked other nationalist candidates to stand aside on this occasion.

She added: "In the face of the continued refusal of the British court to acknowledge her right to bail and the British administration's racist belligerence, inhumanity, we feel this may be her only opportunity to secure her release before the birth of her child."

Mr Haughey was quick to respond that the SDLP would not be putting out of the contest as requested. Sinn Féin, by contrast, said carefully that "if this is a realistic proposition the McAliskey family, Sinn Féin and the SDLP should discuss this issue out fully".

Both Sinn Féin and the SDLP will be approaching the question sensitively, since a sizeable human rights campaign has been built around the issue of the conditions under which Ms McAliskey, who is standing under no party banner, has been held in Holloway.



Roisin McAliskey: Standing in her mother's old constituency

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Labour best for schools, say teachers

Lucy Ward and
Judith Judd

Labour is winning over the electorate on education issues but teachers have abandoned their old loyalty to the Tories, according to two polls published today.

A Harris opinion poll commissioned by the 150,000-strong Association of Teachers and Lecturers in the run-up to its annual conference next week, put Labour well ahead of its rivals on four key education policy issues.

Of more than 1,000 voters interviewed, more trusted Labour than either of the other main parties to invest more cash in schools, get the best out of teachers, offer the best job prospects for children and raise the quality of education.

Almost 60 per cent thought Labour would increase schools spending, giving the party a 34-point lead over the Conservatives, though Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, has pledged to stick to the Government's public spending targets for two years. Tony Blair, the Labour leader, has promised to give education a bigger slice of the cake after five years.

The Conservatives trailed in third place, behind Labour and the Liberal Democrats, with 48 per cent of the public believing they would not deliver on any of the key questions posed.

An ICM poll, commissioned by the National Union of Teachers, found that nearly 40 per cent of 530 teachers questioned last month said they had not decided how to vote. Of those who did declare their intentions, 59 per cent said they would vote

Labour, 21 per cent Liberal Democrat and 15 per cent Conservative.

Doug McAvoy, the NUT's general secretary, said: "Back in 1979, there was a very significant level of support among teachers for the Conservative Party. The message to the political parties is that there is a teachers' vote still out there and it is for them to declare their policies over the next few weeks to attract that vote."

Teachers put more funding for schools and lower class sizes at the top of their list of priorities. He suggested that figures showing that 85 per cent of teachers aged 22-34 were satisfied with their jobs, compared with only 43 per cent of the over-45s, reflected the fact that older teachers could remember "what seemed like a golden age" before the Conservatives came to power.

He also warned that teacher unions would take on a Labour government if it refused to supply enough money for schools. "We shall put the same pressure about funding on any government, irrespective of its colour. We shall try to persuade Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, when he prepares his first budget, that education needs more."

Peter Smith, general secretary of the ATL, urged Mr Blunkett to use the first 100 days of a Labour government to "hold a summit meeting" with the profession. "He has a huge opportunity to call together all the key figures and be absolutely candid with them; tell them what can be done in year one and ask them what their priorities are," he said.

Tales from under the MPs' sheets

Michael Streeter

After years of tabloid revelations about their nocturnal activities, MPs have finally revealed what they really do in bed - slip between the pages of a good book.

In a survey of 61 MPs by the Sleep Council, nearly half said reading helped them relax for sleep, 15 per cent watched television, 7 per cent claimed they talked to their wife, and one (Labour) MP said counting Tories losing their seats did the trick. None mentioned sex.

The ultimate luxury at bed-time for Labour's Joe Ashton was "a dark room and quiet, having been to see Sheffield Wednesday win, followed by

two or three pints and fish and chips". Tony Peter Butler opted for white cotton sheets, a view of a warm ocean and good company - "my wife, of course". Liberal Democrat Alan Beith chose the bed in the Speaker's state room in the Commons.

The Sleep Council, which promotes healthy sleeping, asked the MPs how much sleep they expected to get during the run-up to 1 May. More than one-third said six hours sleep or less a night - a figure that increased to more than half among Liberal Democrat MPs.

When the MPs were asked what they most looked forward to after the election, more than 40 per cent chose a good night's sleep and a lie-in. Surprisingly, one-quarter expected to be in bed by midnight on election night, though whether through confidence, defeatism or sheer exhaustion was not clear.

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Councils may axe home helps, say law lords

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Local authorities may withdraw home help services from the sick and disabled if they cannot afford to provide them, the House of Lords ruled yesterday.

In a ruling of vital importance to the Government's community care policy, the Law Lords, in a 3-2 majority decision, held that a person's home help needs "cannot sensibly be assessed

without having some regard to the cost".

Gloucestershire County Council and the Secretary of State for Health, Stephen Dorrell, were challenging a Court of Appeal decision last year. In 1994 the council had withdrawn services to 1,500 disabled people after £2.5m cuts in government funding. An appeal, backed by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, was brought on behalf of one of those affected, 81-year-old Michael Barry, who had suffered a heart attack and a stroke. He also has poor eyesight and uses a walking frame as a result of a fractured hip.

From 1992, the council had organised home care, visiting Mr Barry twice a week to do shopping, laundry and cleaning as well as providing a meals on wheels service. But in September 1994, the council informed him that cleaning and laundry

services would be withdrawn after government cuts which left it with "nowhere near enough to meet demand".

The 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act states that, where a local authority is satisfied that it is necessary to meet the needs of a disabled person, it "shall make arrangements" for one or more of a range of specified services to be provided. The High Court ruled that it would be "impractical

and unrealistic" to stop councils making cuts if their budgets were reduced.

But last June, Court of Appeal judges ruled that the council was wrong to consider its own financial resources when assessing the needs of a disabled person, and decided that there would have to be cuts.

Lord Nicholls said yesterday: "Even if the council wished to raise the money itself to meet the need by increasing council tax, it would be unable to do so by reason of government-imposed rate-capping," he said. He said he had read the tes-

timony of the council's director of social services, and its chief executive, "with something approaching despair".

"Most depressing of all" were councillors' feelings of "abhorrence" at the tough choices that had to be made. A disabled person's needs "cannot be affected by the local authority's inability to meet those needs", he said. "Every child needs a new pair of shoes from time to time. The need is not less because his

parents cannot afford them." Lord Lloyd said the decision had enabled Gloucestershire and other local authorities to escape from the "impossible situation" in which they had been placed by lack of central government funding. "The passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 was a noble aspiration," he wrote. "Having willed the end, Parliament must be asked to provide the means."

Elementary answer to Piltdown tale

Michael Streeter

In a deduction worthy of Sherlock Holmes, a science historian yesterday publicly implicated Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the infamous Piltdown Man hoax, citing the renowned author's own silence on the celebrated palaeontological prank to back his case.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Alleged hoaxer

Richard Milner, a historian at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, said that although the 1912 "discovery" of remains of the so-called "Earliest Englishman" took place close to Sir Arthur's home, near to where he played golf and that he knew the characters involved, there had been no overt reference to the matter in any of his writings.

Referring to the author's fictional detective, Mr Milner

said: "It is like the dog that did not bark in the night. Why didn't Sir Arthur refer to it? It was a very exciting find."

The riddle of who carried out the bone hoax – exposed in 1953 as a mixture of a human skull and orang-utan jaw – has long intrigued scientists and historians.

Early suspects included Charles Dawson, the solicitor who found the remains in a Sussex quarry, later widening to Sir Arthur as well. Last year Professor Brian Gardiner of King's College, London, said he was "100 per cent" certain that the hoaxer was Martin Hinton, the Natural History Museum's curator of zoology in 1912.

Yesterday, in a debate organised by the Linnean Society, (named after the inventor of the system of Latin classification for flora and fauna), Mr Milner, Professor Gardiner and other experts got forward rival theories for the culprit.

Mr Milner told *The Independent* that his main evidence against Sir Arthur was his motive, and clues in his novel *The Lost World* – in which a scientist announces the discovery of dinosaurs to a sceptical scientific establishment. He rejects the theory the hoax was perpetrated by a scientist trying to make a reputation; and suggests the instigator was someone trying to show up the gullibility of scientists.

The writer's motive, said Mr Milner, came from his devotion

to spiritualism, a belief widely ridiculed by scientists. In particular, Sir Arthur was angered by the prosecution of his favourite psychic, Henry Slade, by an evolutionist in 1876.

"Conan Doyle had the deepest kind of motive for wanting to take revenge on scientists," said Mr Milner. The author had exploited English scientists' desire to find their own prehistoric human bones at a time when both France and Germany already had their own collections.

Mr Milner also believes Sir Arthur left an abundance of clues in *The Lost World* – published in the same year as the hoax – that suggest he was behind the staining and placing of

the bones. One of its characters is quoted saying that faking bones was as easy as faking photographs.

The book also contains a key containing 18 characters, which Mr Milner believes is a cryptogram holding the solution to the Piltdown hoax, a device he may have borrowed from Jules Verne.

"I think Conan Doyle wanted to be discovered quite quickly," said Mr Milner. However, as the outbreak of war loomed, Sir Arthur had wanted to advise the Government on the dangers of German U-boats, and thus did not want to be known as a hoaxer. "The cryptogram changed from edition to edition

I think he thought that as the secret was not discovered quickly he would obscure it."

Mr Milner said he was confident of his theory, but conceded that the riddle was unlikely to be solved definitively unless some "genius" cracked the cryptogram, or unless private papers of Sir Arthur, which may be available for study in the next few years, revealed his involvement.

"I am not trying to denigrate Conan Doyle, he was a very honourable man. I think no less of him for doing it – he believed it was the most important thing in the world to convert people to what was essentially his religion," said Mr Milner.

Missing link: 'Piltdown Man', a faked remains found in 1912. Was the hoax perpetrated by Sherlock Holmes's creator to discredit evolutionists?

Photograph: Second reconstruction of Piltdown Man skull by Sir Arthur Smith Woodward.

Celebrated hoaxes of the 20th century

The famous 1934 picture of the Loch Ness monster in fact showed a model based on a Woolworth's toy submarine with a plastic head made by a team of hoaxers.

In 1938, six million listeners to CBS radio heard a "news bulletin" announcing an invasion by Martians. People took to the streets in panic, thinking the broadcast, which was part of Orson Welles's adaptation of *War of the Worlds*, was really taking place.

German forger Konrad Kajau fooled eminent historians and *The Sunday Times* with Hitler's diaries, which he wrote to pay for a drunken affair.

In 1995, the Queen was tricked into broadcasting a message of support to Canada by a DJ called Pierre Brassard posing as the Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien.

A Capital Radio DJ once announced that because of the adjustment between GMT and BST, April 5 and April 12 had been cancelled.

FO seeks report as police fire on fans

Kim Sengupta

Foreign Office officials yesterday demanded an explanation from Portugal after dozens of Manchester United fans protested about the use of rubber bullets and tear gas by police after a football match in Oporto.

At least 20 fans were injured, eight of them requiring hospital treatment. But there was confusion last night about what caused their wounds.

The British Embassy in Lisbon confirmed that rubber bullets were fired by the police. But Delphine Pussin, head of police in Oporto denied this. He said although CS gas had been used "I can guarantee that not a single shot was fired. We evacuated the fans with more civility than I think they expected, and that was nice at the end."

But United fans, who were returning to Manchester when the trouble erupted, accused the police of carrying out unprovoked baton charges outside the ground before the match and firing on people leaving after the match.

The Foreign Office said: "We are concerned at reports of injuries to around 20 fans... We are aware of reports, and have also been told by a number of fans, that their injuries were caused by police batons and rubber pellets. We are seeking a full police report from the Portuguese authorities."

However, Portuguese police accused United fans of being drunk and violent. One senior officer said police "were forced to use anti-riot equipment".

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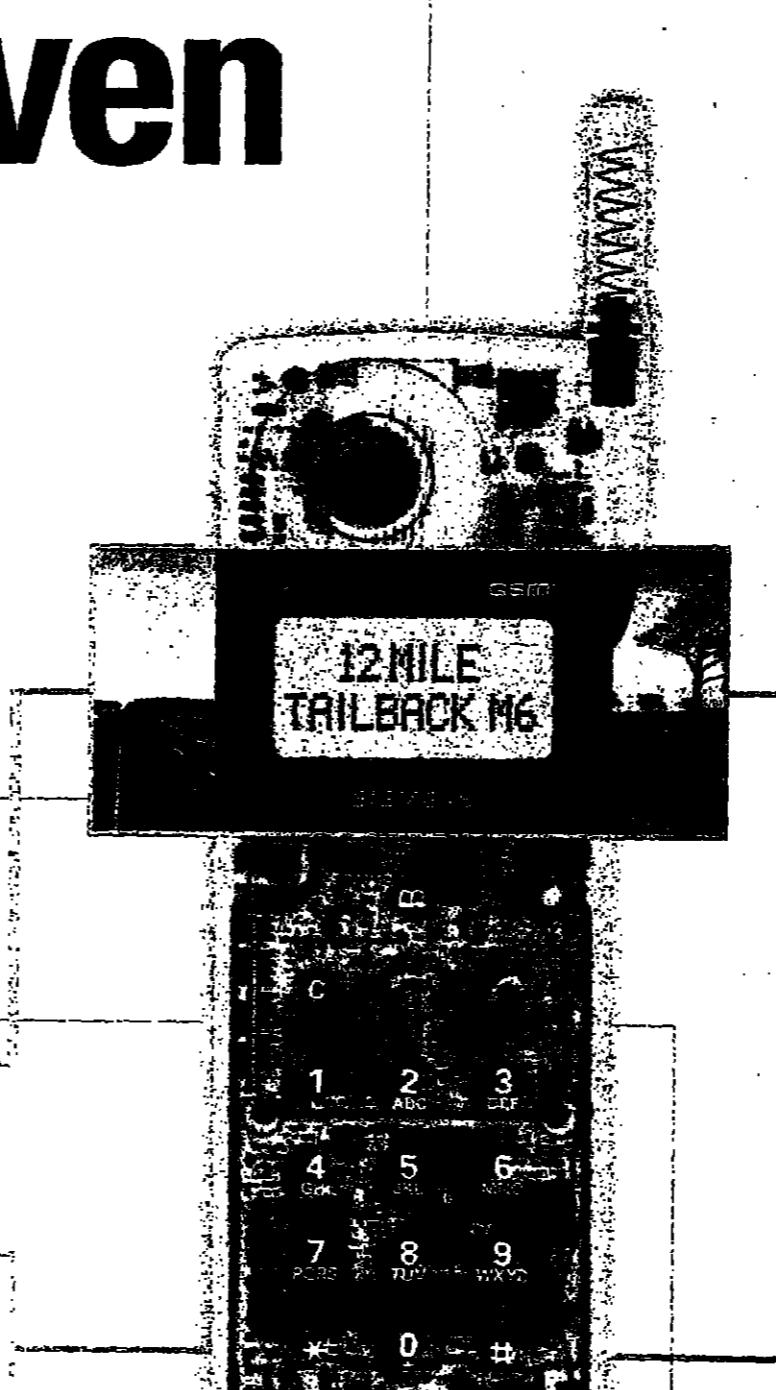
Shoulders together: Peter O'Toole (left) and Sean Connery were among the pall-bearers at the funeral yesterday in north London of their fellow actor Ronald Fraser, who died last week

Photograph: Richard Chambury/Alpha

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Criminal justice system fails to lessen drug use

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

Prison and community sentences do not deter addicts from taking drugs and in some cases result in greater consumption, according to the findings of a new Home Office study.

Drug offenders who are jailed actually increase the amount and variety of illegal substances they use a year after their imprisonment, the report concluded. Offenders who get non-custodial sentences continue to take about the same amounts of drugs. The study also found that only about 5 per cent of the sample received regular drug treatment in the community 12 months after being sentenced.

About half took heroin, four in ten had tried crack and most took a combination of drugs which also included cannabis, amphetamine, tranquillisers, and LSD.

The group was interviewed a year after conviction – about half were given jail sentences and half community penalties – but only 71 responded.

Those who were imprisoned consumed more types of drug in the month at the end of the year than at the beginning – from 81 types to 101 – while the number of times drugs were used in the month increased, from 2.5 per person to 3.1. For those who received a non-custodial sentence the rates declined slightly, but not significantly. Over the year, about half the drug users were reconvicted of further offences.

The report, Persistent Drug Misusing Offenders, based on a study by Professor Philip Bean and Dianne Winterburn of Loughborough University, interviewed 145 persistent drug offenders. The sample, who were mostly unemployed, white single men in their twenties, had committed a range of offences including burglary, theft, violence, and drug possession and supply.

About half took heroin, four in ten had tried crack and most took a combination of drugs which also included cannabis, amphetamine, tranquillisers, and LSD.

The group was interviewed a year after conviction – about half were given jail sentences and half community penalties – but only 71 responded.

He said: "We need treatment and education to assist drug users to radically change their situations and habits. The criminal justice system has very little impact."

DAILY POEM

England Nil

By Anne Rouse

The advance to Hamburg broke with all the plans.
Doug spelled them out in Luton Friday night.
Someone had bailed it up. A dozen vans
Waited in convoy, ringside. Blue and white
We stumbled through. The beer
When we found it in that piss-hole of jerries
Was all we needed. Who won the war,
Anyhow? Who nuked Dresden? Two fairies
Skittered behind the bar, talking Kraut
Or maybe Arabic. We clocked the poison
Smiles and chanted till the SS threw us out.
Stuttgart was a tea-party to this. One
By one they've nicked us, berserk and bare
You've been Englished but you won't forget it, never.

This poem is one of seven by the Washington-born, London-based Anne Rouse to appear in *Making For Planet Alice*, the recent anthology of 30 "new women poets" edited by Maura Dooley for Bloodaxe Books (28.95). Other poets represented include Susan Wicks, Jackie Kay, Mimi Khalvati, Ruth Padel and Kate Clanchy.

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Har Homa protesters overrun shrine

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Palestinian demonstrators hurled rocks at Israeli troops in Bethlehem and Jewish settlers moved into a Palestinian district in East Jerusalem yesterday further damaging the prospects for a peace agreement aimed at ending the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The riot started when 300 students from Bethlehem university held a march protesting at the construction of a Jewish township at Har Homa between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. As they approached Rachel's Tomb, a heavily fortified Jewish shrine protected by Israeli troops, 40 Palestinian protesters tried to hold them back, but were overrun.

Sheltering behind a wall by a petrol station, the soldiers fired tear gas grenades, but appeared to be under orders not to fire live rounds. A few stones came skimming towards the troops and Palestinian boys raced forward to lob back the gas grenades. "Perfume from Bethlehem," said an Israeli policeman as choking onlookers were enveloped by a cloud of gas.

Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, appeared to be trying to

prevent protests against Har Homa turning violent, fearing the Palestinians might forfeit international support. Nabi Amr, an adviser to Mr Arafat, said on the Voice of Palestine: "The fruits of world support arrive gradually. It is thanks to such support we have come this far."

But there is a diminishing basis for cooperation or negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. A proposal by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, whereby the present interim phase of the Oslo accords, intended to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, would be dropped and a final agreement reached by the end of the year, was dismissed by Palestinian leaders.

In Jerusalem another development is likely to deepen Palestinian suspicions. Overnight, apparently with the knowledge of Mr Netanyahu, five families belonging to the extreme settler organisation El Ad, moved into a large house formerly occupied by Palestinians in the Silwan district of Jerusalem. This is one of the most heavily contested areas of the city, as it is only 300 yards from al Aqsa mosque and occupies the site of ancient Jerusalem

captured by King David. "The settlers came at 1 pm. They have not said a word to us," said Mohammed Abu Diab, a Palestinian who lives next door to the building taken by El Ad. Several Israeli men inside the house said they were from a security firm and would not speak. Later, Yigal Canaan, the leader of El Ad, said: "This whole hill is part

of ancient Jerusalem and our organisation's goal is for the whole hill to become Jewish."

He is not far from his aim. House after house in Silwan are sprouting Israeli flags. Under the Labour government between 1992 and 1996, no Palestinian houses were taken over. Instead, El Ad and its sister organisation, Ateret Cohanim

(Crown of the Priests), was the target of a government inquiry into how they had illegally received official funds to obtain Palestinian houses. On the morning of Mr Netanyahu's election victory last May – even before it was confirmed – El Ad resumed its campaign.

The settlers have little sympathy for Palestinian occupants.

Amir Ben David, 32, a settler born in the US, will move into a house above the biblical pool of Silwan, next week. He said: "There was a family here before, but the courts told them to leave. This is the City of David." Mr Ben David does not think Jewish settlement should end with the City of David. "Those houses are built on the graves

of Jews from the time of the Second Temple (destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC). The Prime Minister's office said that it had known of the take-over by settlers in Silwan, but had not initiated it. In practice, however, El Ad cannot act without coordination with the armed security guards paid for by the government.



Clash of wills: A Palestinian protester dodging tear gas yesterday as he attempts to hurl a canister at Israeli soldiers in Bethlehem. Photograph: AP

Move to expand Security Council to 24

Agencies

New York — The president of the UN General Assembly yesterday fired the starting gun for a race that could change the face of international politics.

Razali Ismail, of Malaysia, presented a key resolution to enlarge the UN Security Council to allow Japan and Germany to become permanent members, but without veto power.

The document would expand the 15-member council to 24 seats, and it considered the first serious attempt at concrete steps to reform the body after years of discussions. It envisages stages that would take about a year before final decisions are made and voted on by the assembly and the council.

Five countries, the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia, are permanent members with veto powers.

Mr Razali's proposal would add five permanent members and four rotating non-permanent members. Two of the permanent members would be from industrialised states, and one each from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The four non-permanent members would be from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

But none of the new members would have veto power, a provision which Japan and Germany are bound to oppose.

Italy's ambassador, Paolo Fazio, said Mr Razali's proposals would make the council less democratic, creating three, instead of two, categories of members. The British ambassador Sir John Weston said it was a good basis for negotiation and should lead to a decision by the assembly.

Mr Razali hopes his proposal will be adopted by the General Assembly in September, and that the assembly will vote on the actual members of the expanded Security Council by 28 February 1998. A spokeswoman said: Under the proposal, the assembly would vote a week later to amend the UN charter, she said.

War memorial plan provokes a row all out of proportion

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

They're planning a spanking new Second World War monument here. But as with almost every memorial in Washington, the project has sparked a conflict scarcely less fearsome than the one it is meant to commemorate.

This week, Bob Dole, the defeated 1996 Republican presidential candidate who was almost killed by a German shell in 1945, formally

launched a campaign to raise the \$100m (£61m) required for a suitable tribute to the war in which "America saved the world."

Few here would disagree with that sentiment, nor with the proposed design – a plaza enclosed by a 50-foot high colonnade and an embankment planted with white roses. The problem is the chosen site, on the Washington Mall right in the middle of one of the city's – and the country's – greatest vistas, stretching from the

Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial.

"Just like Cinderella's stepsisters whose feet were too big for the glass slipper, World War Two is simply too big for this site," Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, decorated Vietnam war hero and arch-foe of the proposed site, declared in a letter to the country's Battle Monuments Commission. The editor of Architecture magazine went even further. The plan, Deborah Detsch wrote, "dishonours" the ideals

represented by the Mall. But such disputes are as predictable as the imminent flowering of the cherry trees along the Potomac River.

First there was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, re-opening painful divisions between those who insisted it was too self-effacing, and those who believed that that war needed no memorial at all. But if Vietnam, others argued, then why not Korea? And so, a Korean War memorial was duly built. Ah, but no women were fea-

tured in Vietnam I, it was objected. Thus the adjoining new Vietnam Women's Memorial.

Then a squabble erupted over the shrine to Franklin Roosevelt under construction close by. In the interests of historical accuracy, should not one of America's greatest presidents be portrayed in a wheelchair and with the familiar cigarette holder jutting from his mouth? (The answers, after much debate involving the disabled and anti-smoking lobbies: Yes, and No.)

But Mr Dole should not be discouraged. If controversy is certain, so is the outcome. The monuments get built in the end, and everybody loves them.

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international

Bonn wants limit to first wave of Nato expansion

Agencies — Nato should invite only three new members when the alliance moves toward eastward expansion this summer, German's Defence Minister said yesterday.

"I favour starting carefully and then developing the relationship between Nato and Russia," Volker Ruhe said. "In my view, we should start with three members."

The alliance plans to offer some former Soviet bloc countries membership at an alliance summit meeting in Madrid on 8-9 July. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are the most likely candidates. But some countries have plumped for other candidates. Italy has backed Slovenia and France has called for Romania to be invited.

Mr Ruhe's comments made it plain that Germany opposes widening the first group, although he said the allies have not made a final decision. Mr Ruhe added: "There must also be a clear signal that the process will continue."

There is still debate within Nato over whether enlargement will continue to include a second wave of countries.

President Jacques Chirac said yesterday that all European countries had a right to join the Atlantic alliance. Mr Chirac's office said he made the comment in a meeting with visiting Slovakian Prime Minister, Vladimir Mečiar, whose country is not expected to be in the first group of countries invited to join the alliance.

There is particular concern amongst the Baltic states, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, that they will not be included in the first wave of expansion. In Brussels, on Wednesday, Lithuania's Foreign Minister, Algirdas Saudargas, said at least one of the three should be included.

"In order to make the enlargement process a success, it is important that at least one Baltic country should be invited to join the alliance with the first group," Mr Saudargas told a meeting of Nato am-

bassadors and aspirant members. "We want to be part of the alliance, because both common sense and the success of the alliance members suggest that the best, the most effective, and the least expensive way of building and developing a national defence system is through participation in collective defence arrangements."

In Helsinki yesterday, about 30 Lithuanian students gathered across the street from President Bill Clinton's hotel to press their demand for their country's admission to Nato.

The students, chanting "We will be in Nato," to the rhythm of Queen's "We Will Rock You," earlier stood outside Finlandia Hall, one of the press centres set up for the meeting of Mr Clinton and Russia's President Boris Yeltsin.

The students distributed flyers appealing to Mr Clinton to push for Nato membership for Lithuania, because "our security and enhanced stability are not a threat to anybody, neither East nor West".



New image: Russian dolls of Yeltsin, Clinton and family on sale in Moscow. Photograph: AP



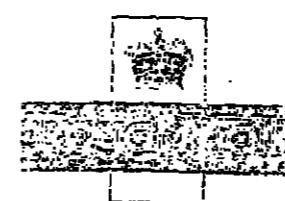
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ENGLISH HERITAGE



US-Russia leaders find health to talk

Tony Barber
Helsinki

A wheelchair-bound United States president and an ageing leader of Russia will attempt to map out the future of European security today at a meeting superficially reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt's talks with Josef Stalin at Yalta in 1945.

President Bill Clinton, hobbled by a knee injury, and President Boris Yeltsin, recently recovered from heart surgery and pneumonia, hope to settle at least some details of a new security order that would deepen Nato's relationship with Russia while permitting the alliance to expand into central and eastern Europe.

A clear sign that the US and Russia are making progress emerged yesterday when Mr Yeltsin's spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, indicated that Moscow was no longer demanding that its agreement with Nato should be legally binding. He suggested that Russia would be satisfied if the agreement was "politically binding", as was the 1975 Helsinki Final Act on European security.

It remains unclear, however, whether the Nato-Russia agreement will be ready for signing at the time of the alliance's July summit in Madrid, when Nato will issue formal invitations to its prospective new members.

As the two leaders flew into Helsinki yesterday, Russian officials were adamant that the Kremlin would not change its view that Nato was making a grave mistake by insisting on enlargement. Mr Yeltsin, in a statement at the airport, predicted that his summit talks would be "difficult and serious" but said he thought Mr Clinton would work to find a compromise.

US officials stressed, as they have done for months, that Nato's planned expansion was

not directed against Russia, but acknowledged that the Russians did not see matters in the same light. "I think that they have not yet internalised what is that we have been telling them," Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, said.

Mr Clinton's National Security Adviser, Samuel Berger, added: "We are going to disagree on Nato enlargement ... and the issue is how we work together in spite of that issue on which we disagree."

The summit, the twelfth meeting between Mr Clinton and Mr Yeltsin in five years, is viewed across Europe as one of the most significant US-Russian encounters since 1945, with much at stake for the whole continent.

The two men were guests last night at a banquet in Finland's presidential palace, but the substance talks start today. Mr Yeltsin, looking thinner but more cheerful and robust than for many months, braved icy weather as he spoke at the airport of his hopes for the summit. "The most important thing we must remember is that not only our two countries but Europe and the whole world are watching us. We must not lose the partnership that we have developed in recent times," he said.

Despite Russia's steadfast public opposition to Nato enlargement, the outlines of a deal that will enable the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to join the alliance by 1999 have been gradually hammered out in recent weeks at private talks between Russian and Western officials. If all goes well at the summit, the future relationship will be codified in a document that will guarantee close Russian involvement in many alliance activities and deepen co-operation on matters such as military doctrines, nuclear non-proliferation and counter-terrorism.

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international

Zaire holds its breath as rebels dictate plans for the future

Ed O'Loughlin
Goma

In a large school building near the airport at Goma more than 1,000 adults sat hunched over notebooks and scraps of paper; their pens moving in unison. From the platform a man in a blue denim shirt dictated slowly into a microphone.

Lesson one: The seven errors leading to the failure of the 1964-65 Congo rebellion. Lesson two: The basic cell. Lesson three: Social classes and the class struggle. Lesson four: The principle aims of revolution...

As he spoke, his words were being echoed in other centres all over the rebel-held swathe of eastern Zaire. With the war against President Mobutu's government going all the rebels' way, their alliance of democratic forces for the liberation of Congo-Zaire has launched a series of "transformation" seminars to "re-ideologise" some of the most brutalised, down-trodden and cynical people in Africa, and possibly on the planet. After 10 lessons - voluntary, the rebels insist - candidates will be evaluated on their ideological correctness and the best pupils may then be hired as public servants.

For a movement that professes to believe in the free market, and which enjoys tacit diplomatic support from the United States, the choice of Marxist teaching material might seem a little strange.

The rebels are now poised to destroy Mr Mobutu's regime, but nobody yet knows what they will put in its place. After three decades of what one Western observer called "kleptocracy" - rule by thieves - many Zaireans believe that anything will be better than the devil they know.

With the war still on, the rebels' future agenda remains vague. Originating as a revolt by persecuted ethnic Tutsis in the Kivu region, the rebel movement has broadened its support to include members of ethnic groups from all over Zaire.

Veteran Marxist bush-fighters like the rebel leader Laurent Kabila (a one-time comrade of Che Guevara, the legendary revolutionary) have been joined by

committed free-marketeers like the finance minister Muamanga Mwana Nanga, who spent 10 years in the US and who holds a doctorate in agricultural economics from the University of Kentucky.

The alliance is also strongly influenced by the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, whom Kinshasa has accused of fomenting the rebellion and even of supplying troops and weapons. With so many different agendas at work, the only thing that unites everybody is a desire to get rid of Mr Mobutu's Zaire.

But with corruption deeply ingrained in its society, Mr Kabila's Congo republic - he has reinstated the name of the leftist post-colonial state in the territory under his control - will have to police itself tightly if it is to prove any better than Mr Mobutu's Zaire.

Since the rebels took over last November, the Rwanda-Zaire border post in Goma - a useful barometer of local corruption - has become more expensive and more hostile than ever. Last Saturday, child-soldiers manned the barrier on the Zaire-Congo side - strutting back and forth with peeled sticks and AK47s, harassing and at times beating a group of local women returning from a market in neighbouring Rwanda. They were unfazed by the presence of foreign journalists.

Inside the immigration office the officials exacted an astonishing £700 (£440) for allowing a laptop computer and a television camera to enter the country. The information and finance ministries later admitted that no such "tax" has ever been authorised.

They blame the corruption on officials still in place from the Mobutu regime, but journalists can claim that the authorities have taken no action against the officials concerned and have made no attempt to refund the money. One French reporter fumed: "I lived for two years in Kinshasa under Mobutu and was expelled three times, but it was never as bad as this. You could always make a telephone call and sort things out."

The Information Ministry has taken over Radio Star of Goma and renamed it "The voice of the people", broadcasting round-the-clock praise of the alliance's heroic troops, and denunciations of the "sanguinary enemy".

Newspapers are censored. People in the street lower their voices and look carefully around when asked for their opinion of the rebels. Most say they know there is a war on and are willing to make sacrifices in the hope of a brighter future, but others complain about commandeered cars and houses, and high "import taxes" for food and drugs purchased in the well-

stocked markets of Rwanda. "They say they have come to reconstruct Zaire," said one Goma native. "We will wait and see if this is the case."

■ Kinshasa (AP) — Zaire's prime minister returned home from a crisis meeting in Kenya yesterday to face a parliament

that claims to have ousted him and a popular opposition leader who intends to replace him. Parliament voted to sack Leon Kengo Wa Dondo on Tuesday, but spokesmen for the Mobutu regime have said the vote fell short of a constitutional requirement. Supporters of Etienne Tshisekedi, opposition leader and long-time Mobutu foe, said that Mr Tshisekedi should take over the government and open talks with the rebels. Mr Tshisekedi was elected prime minister by parliament in 1992 but Mr Mobutu refused to confirm him as premier.

Belgians are the least frequent users of condoms in Europe, according to a survey published by Durex. They said 14.5 million condoms were sold in Belgium in 1996 - an average of just over three per sexually active person per year, compared with 5.5 in France, 7.0 in Britain and 10.3 in Spain.

significant shorts

Thieves of time show refined taste

Thieves have given a new meaning to the adage that time is money, with the theft of 1,600 Swatch watches dating back to Swatch's earliest days, in 1983.

Nearly 2,000 of the chic functional watches have been travelling the world as part of a touring Swatch museum. A sealed container of them, valued at £200,000, was unloaded last week in the Cyprus port of Limassol. Yesterday, however, the display cases were found to be almost empty. A Swatch spokeswoman described the loss as "extremely distressing". Perhaps most distressing of all for the manufacturers is that one watch has been left behind. It may have failed to meet the thieves' exacting street-fashion standards.

Alice Lagrado

India lowers barriers

India announced it would ease travel restrictions for Pakistanis, as the two hostile neighbours prepared to resume official talks after three years. Pakistani tourists will be allowed to visit India in groups and Pakistani businessmen can apply for one-year visas. AP - New Delhi

Capital punishment ban

Poland's Parliament approved a new penal code, replacing capital punishment with life imprisonment, bringing the country in line with the European Union. AP - Warsaw

Asylum offered in Peru siege

Cuba confirmed that it had accepted a formal request from Japan to grant asylum to Peruvian Marxist rebels holding 72 hostages at the Japanese ambassador's home in Lima if there was a negotiated settlement to the 93-day crisis.

Reuters - Havana

Violence in Gdansk

Poland's Prime Minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, accused Solidarność of trying to lead the country into anarchy as demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails, paint and rocks in protest at the closure of the Gdansk shipyard.

AP - Warsaw

UN approves all-Africa force

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan endorsed a United States proposal for an all-Africa military force to respond to crises on the continent. "I think the ... scheme ... could be very helpful for the continent," he said after meeting President Nelson Mandela.

AP - Cape Town

Hussein harsh on army

King Hussein said that a Jordanian soldier's killing of seven Israeli schoolgirls was "a mark of shame" on the army. In a letter to heads of security departments, he also said that the soldiers' comrades should have moved to "kill him immediately".

AP - Amman

Something for the year, sir?

Belgians are the least frequent users of condoms in Europe, according to a survey published by Durex. They said 14.5 million condoms were sold in Belgium in 1996 - an average of just over three per sexually active person per year, compared with 5.5 in France, 7.0 in Britain and 10.3 in Spain.

Reuters - Brussels



Gun power: Rebel soldiers patrolling the streets of Goma, Zaire. Photograph: Reuters

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Match 5 plus bonus ball	9	£1,232,088	—
Match 5	205	£789,560	—
Match 4	20,454	£6,692,636	—
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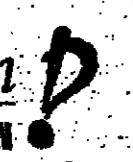
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PLAY FANTASY POLITICS.



ANDREW NEIL, HEAD OF PRIME MINISTER BLAIR'S POLICY UNIT.

New Statesman  WHAT'S GOING ON?

CONTRIBUTORS THIS WEEK: BRIAN ENO, FAY WELDON, WILL SELF, IAN JACK, DEB WILSON, JOHN LLOYD, JOHN HUMPHREYS, MARY RIDDELL, SIMON HEFFER. £1.90 OUT NOW.

obituaries / gazette

Willem de Kooning

The death of Willem de Kooning at the great age of 92, after suffering from the deprivations of Alzheimer's disease for more than a decade, severs our last link with that heroic and wholly innovative era of painting in the United States which flourished for a quarter of a century from the mid-1940s onward, loosely and variably bound by the principles of abstract expressionism.

This is not to say that distinguished and challenging painting in one mode or another has not appeared in the US from time to time since that period. But 50 years ago, with his friends and near contemporaries Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman, de Kooning radically modified our idea of art by transforming our expectations of painting and thus changed forever our habitual sense of what a painting should look like – a climactic moment, universally experienced, in the evolution of art in this century, comparable to the arrival of cubism in Paris 40 years earlier.

The impact of abstract expressionism on artists and the art public in Europe in the late Fifties and Sixties was dramatic and decisive. Nobody around at the time can forget the sheer excitement, the visual panache, of those first big shows in London at the Whitechapel Gallery of Pollock, Kline, Rothko, Mark Tobey – a founding figure for the new language but too often overlooked today – Philip Guston and others from 1958, together with "The New American Painting" show at the Tate. Of all these artists, Pollock probably made the most radical contribution to art since Picasso because of his entirely new and original approach to the very act of painting which was indissoluble from the nature of his imagery. Nobody had thrown, splattered or poured, dripped or dribbled paint out onto a canvas laid flat on the floor before and if this action initially aroused derision, the fine-spun delicacy and radiance, the sheer verve, of the resultant images quickly converted the spectator.

But Pollock died tragically young and his comparatively short lifespan of work has to be seen as a lyrical outpouring of exceptional force and intensity.

And his art, in particular, like the more extended flow of equally abstract imagery from the longer-lived Rothko, appeared to close down the possibilities for painting rather than extend them to exist as an impossibly grand and sumptuous finality rather than extending a bridge for other artists to explore and cross. Some kinds of art leave everything open for others to follow, others close everything off. It is a fundamental difference between the open art of Robert Rauschenberg and the closed discourses of Jasper Johns.

It was left to de Kooning to give an almost physical reassurance and an imaginative sense of a possible future to younger painters in Europe and America in the late Fifties, when many artists were seeking our ways of sustaining the validity of figurative painting at a time when abstract imagery of all kinds seemed to be so strongly in the ascendant. Between the polarities of Dubuffet's sophisticated infantilism and de Staél's late, effulgent Fauve manner, figurative painting was debilitated and lost, lacking in credibility. Bacon in England was another impossible act to follow.

De Kooning not only restored credibility to figurative art but gave it a fresh currency. In this he was not quite alone: Guston also gave hope to many figurative painters through the series of big semi-abstract still life paintings and interiors of c.1959-62. But de Kooning swept the boards through the sheer force of the new synthesis at white heat that he created between the subject of the painting – which Pollock had surmounted or lost – and the anarchic bravura of its execution.

Reluctant at first to believe that de Kooning was not too strongly rooted in the 19th century – because my perceived role at the Whitechapel in the Fifties and Sixties was to try to help the English public, visually backward at the time, to see and understand the different phases of abstract art from Malevich and Mondrian on – I was totally converted by his 1959 show in New York at the Sidney Janis Gallery of blazing, light-drenched landscape canvases, based on the fields and dunes

around the coastline of the Hamptons where de Kooning had acquired a studio. This was landscape seen, felt, experienced in a new way, in vehemently focussed close-up so that sea, sky and vegetation make a new, taut drama, expressed through broadly slashed brushstrokes and thickly gleaming pigment.

I was still too young to see that the earlier and magnifi-

cently frenetic and repellent paintings of women, which seemed excessively grotesque, like bashed dolls, were not really paintings of women so much as what happens to women: what men do to women and what women do to themselves in the hysteria of the pop performance world, fashion, eros and self-travesty, all plainly visible in Manhattan.

De Kooning's most per-

haps beautiful paintings, perhaps, came even earlier, in the late Forties when he had been concerned with the city as an experience as well as with the *burnau figure*, with which he had odd difficulties, and made some kind of fusion between the two themes, resulting in a sequence of miraculously "occupied" canvases, free of the human figure but alert, bristling with its presence. *Excavation*,

that de Kooning's art as a whole will still be as highly regarded at the end of the next century as it is today, although I do not see much merit in his sculpture. Time will tell.

A man of great charm, humour, zest for life and total privacy, very much the artist as gregarious loner, de Kooning was born in 1904 in Rotterdam to parents who divorced when he was five; his custody was given to the father, but his mother, who owned a bar, successfully appealed against the decision and brought him up. Appointed to a commercial art firm, the young de Kooning attended night classes at the Rotterdam Academy, won awards, began to travel, and supported himself by sign-painting, cartoons, and designing window displays. He emigrated to the United States in 1926 illegally, planning to work as a commercial artist.

He lived in great poverty throughout the later Twenties and Thirties, gradually establishing contact with the art of his time. His early friendships with fellow artists Stuart Davis and Arshile Gorky were extremely important, and there are many shared preoccupations with line, for a time, in the paintings of de Kooning and Gorky. Edwin Denby, the legendary dance critic, and Harold Rosenberg were also among his friends in the Thirties. Tom Hess, the critic and dashing associate editor on *Art News*, was a later friend and exponent.

But it was Franz Kline, blessed with a charm, grace, intelligence and wit which more than matched de Kooning's, who became his closest friend from c.1939 on. Following Gorky's suicide in 1948, Kline and de Kooning drew even closer together, united by wit, a passion for girls and a love of drink. All this was tough going for visitors: Kline's favourite meeting time in his favourite bar being 11pm, after his late-starting working day was over.

By then, de Kooning had married Elaine Fried, a New York painter of considerable style and intelligence who devoted herself to de Kooning's success and wellbeing. But in 1956, Kline and de Kooning were exchanging girlfriends turn and turn about with such alternating regularity that it seemed almost like a form of homosexuality by proxy.

Backed by all his fellow artists, including Duchamp, de Kooning was achieving some success by the early Fifties, though hardly riches. His first series of "Women", exhibited in 1953, brought him notoriety, but also a broader reputation. In 1963, he moved out of New York City to a permanent new home and studio at the Springs, in the Hamptons, not far from the studios of his friends Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. De Kooning's studio in its heyday seemed almost like the crowded dock of an affluent boat-builder.

There is no doubt that the large Soutine retrospective held at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1950 had as cathartic an effect on de Kooning's vision as Picasso and Gorky had in earlier years. De Kooning gave a new and personal dimension to expressionism and to the intensely "inhabited" or psychologically intensified view of landscape and the figure painting which Soutine, one of the greatest figures in the art of the 20th century, established and developed. But enigma that he was, with a Northern sense of colour and ironic view of life perhaps inherited from his homeland, de Kooning brought a New World brash sensitivity to bear on his personal development from Picasso and Soutine, and perfected a richly hectic sense of colour that does a great deal to accelerate and to assure the rush to our nerve-endings that the finest painting by de Kooning always detonates.

His peak was reached by 1980, and by then he had created a magisterial body of work, sensuous, always questing and probing, always saying something however obliquely about the human condition, the business of being alive, all set out in an exemplary exhibition two years ago at the Tate Gallery, memorably hung by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester, one of de Kooning's earliest and best champions in Europe.

Bryan Robertson

Willem de Kooning, artist; born Rotterdam 24 April 1904; married 1943 Elaine Fried (died 1988; one daughter); died East Hampton, New York 19 March 1997.



Elaine and Willem de Kooning with one of his magnificently frenetic paintings of women, 1953. Photograph: Abbeville Press / John Murray

Mikhail Voslensky

Mikhail Voslensky single-handedly put the word *nomenklatura* into Western languages as he revealed and explained the powerful network of corrupt, power-hungry party officials who ran the Soviet Union in their own interest.

The *nomenklatura* is a class of privileged exploiters. It acquired wealth from power, not power from wealth," he wrote. "The domestic policy of the *nomenklatura* class is to consolidate its dictatorial power, and its foreign policy is to extend it to the whole world." The Yugoslav dissident Milivoj Djilas, whose 1957 book *The New Class* had first put the privileges of the Communist élite on the agenda, was enthusiastic about the "extraordinary qualities" of Voslensky's work. That he, like Djilas, had initially been a part of this system did not undermine his authority; indeed, he was able to incorporate information and insights from his own experience into his published works.

Voslensky was born in

Bardyansk on the Azov Sea in 1920, the son of an economist and a teacher. He studied in Moscow at the Lomonosov University during the difficult conditions of the Second World War, graduating in 1944. He then entered the Pedagogical Institute there for further studies, eventually gaining a PhD in history in 1965 (the father gained other graduate degrees from the Foreign Ministry Institute of International Relations in Moscow and the GDR Academy of State and Law in Potsdam). His study was interrupted by a spell in Muremberg as a translator at the War Crimes Tribunal, and later on the staff of the Allied Control Council for Germany.

From 1949 he was an editor at the Soviet Information Bureau in Moscow, followed by a year each in Prague on the World Peace Council and in Vienna as deputy head of the information service. In 1955 he returned to Moscow to join the Soviet Academy of Sciences as a researcher, a post he held until

1972. From 1965 he was also academic secretary of the Commission on the Scientific Problems of Disarmament, from 1968 a member of the Soviet Pugwash Committee and from 1969 a member of the social sciences committee of the Soviet Unesco Commission. Added to these posts in 1970 was the vice-chairmanship of the Historians' Commission of the USSR and the GDR, and in 1971 membership of the Soviet Committee for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Between 1954 and 1968 he published four books on Germany's international relations and also taught history at Lumumba University in Moscow.

This successful, but mind-numbing crawl up the Soviet bureaucratic ladder came to an abrupt end in 1972 when, while a guest lecturer at Linz University, the Soviet authorities refused to grant him an extension to his sabbatical and he decided to defect. In the West he put to good use in the academic world his unrivalled knowledge

of the inner workings of the bureaucracy and contacts with the privileged class that ran the Soviet Union. He lectured at various universities in Austria and West Germany and in 1980 published in Germany his main book, *Nomenklatura: the Soviet ruling class*, which was later translated into 14 languages (including an updated English version in 1984). From 1981 he headed the Institute for Contemporary Soviet Research in Munich.

In the wake of his defection Voslensky took on Austrian citizenship. He later claimed that the Soviet authorities were so alarmed at the prospect he would reveal his knowledge of the inner workings of the system that agents had been sent to kidnap him. In 1977 he was stripped of Soviet citizenship, a decision that was only revoked under Mikhail Gorbachev. In 1991 he published a revised version of his *Nomenklatura* book and the following year it was published for the first time in Moscow. Voslensky never gave

up his research. When the Soviet archives were opened he started burrowing there, publishing in 1995 *New Secrets of the Nomenklatura*, focusing on the last few years of the Soviet Union's existence.

Voslensky was proud that his writing had brought a realistic approach to Soviet politics and study of its power structure. If his interest in the *nomenklatura* was too much of an obsession and his depiction of the privilege and corruption of the élite was rather too simplistic, his views were tempered by his modest manner and corrosive humour. He had no heroes (although he was a vigorous supporter of the anti-Soviet mujahedin in Afghanistan). His knowledge of the Soviet system from the inside allowed him to attack it at what he believed was its weakest point.

Felix Corley

Mikhail Sergeyevich Voslensky, historian; born Bardyansk, Ukraine 6 December 1920; died 2 February 1997.

Gethyn Stoodley Thomas was one of Wales's best known television film-makers, contributing to a tradition of documentary film-making firmly rooted in the BBC's Welsh operation. He worked for the corporation for 30 years – in Belfast and London as well as Cardiff, to which he returned in 1959 despite efforts to keep him in London.

He began in 1950 as a radio producer for the BBC in Northern Ireland and was one of the first broadcasters to switch to television. In London, from 1957 he was the producer of the acclaimed *Tonight* current affairs programme when his chief was Donald Baverstock and his assistant produced Alasdair Milne, who later became the BBC's director-general. Back in his native Wales a string of documentaries marked him out as a film-maker *par excellence*.

They included *The Fire and the Fountain* (1975), a vivid portrait of the artists Augustus John and his sister Gwen, and *A Love Affair With Life* (1969), which brought to the screen Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, the creator of the Italianate Welsh village Port Meirion. His much-praised series on the history of the Rhondda, *The Long Street* (1965), is an important record of industrial south Wales which today has changed almost beyond recognition. *Towers Out of Time* (1970) paid tribute to the 19th-century architect William Burges who renovated Cardiff Castle and reconstructed Castell Coch (Red Castle), a

medieval fantasy perched above the M4 a couple of miles north of the Welsh capital. One of his inspirations, the series *Songs of Praise*, still draws a faithful BBC1 audience on Sunday evenings 36 years on.

The son of a Pontypridd butcher, Stoodley Thomas was educated at Maesteg Grammar School and London University, graduating at University College Cardiff in Botany and Zoology in 1936. During the Second World War he served with the Royal Navy. After the war he taught in Cardiff and in his spare time wrote extensively for radio – an activity which paved the way for a long and fruitful career at the BBC.

When he retired some 20 years ago he became television critic at the *Western Mail*.

Tony Heath

Gethyn Stoodley Thomas, film maker and producer; born Pontypridd, Glamorgan 11 October 1912; married 1942 Phyllis Evans (one son, two daughters); died Cardiff 18 March 1997.

New court fees denied access to justice

LAW REPORT

20 March 1997

Court Fees Order 1980 (SI 821) which had relieved litigants in person who were in receipt of income support from the obligation to pay fees and had permitted the Lord Chancellor to reduce or remit the fee in exceptional circumstances on the ground of undue financial hardship.

Dr John Freeman, to be representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, to the UN Industrial Development Organisation and to other UN organisations at Vienna, with the personal rank of Ambassador.

Mr Christopher Ian McGonigal, Judge of the Circuit Mercantile Judge, to be President of the Association of District Judges. Mr W.R.A. Ross, to be Secretary and Keeper of the Records of the Duchy of Cornwall.

Mr Stephen Layton, to be Organist and Director of the Choir of the Temple Church.

The applicant, who was on income support, wished to bring proceedings in person for defamation, for which legal aid is not available. The 1996 Order increased to £120 the fee for issuing a writ for claims less than £10,000 and to £500 for claims without a monetary limit. There was no exemption for litigants, such as the applicant, who could not afford the fees.

The actual or purported fees for the 1996 Order was in section 130 of the Supreme Court Act 1981. But it was argued that not permit the Lord Chancellor to exercise his power to prescribe court fees in such a way as to deprive the citizen of his constitutional right of access to the courts.

Article 3 of the 1996 Order repealed provisions in article 5(1) and (3) of the Supreme

law and article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The common law did not generally speak in the language of constitutional rights. In the unwritten legal order of the British state, at a time when common law continued to accord a legislative supremacy to Parliament, a constitutional right could in his Lordship's judgment, only inhere in the following proposition: that the right in question could not be abrogated by the state save by specific provision in an Act of Parliament, or by regulations whose *vises* in main legislation specifically conferred the power to abrogate.

General words would not suffice and any such rights would be creatures of the common law, since their existence would not be the consequence of the democratic political process but would be logically prior to it.

The common law provided no lesser protection of the right of access to the courts than might be vindicated by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The

House of Lords had held the same to be true in relation to the right of freedom of expression, and the right of access to justice could not be thought a lesser right than that. Indeed, the right to a fair trial, which of necessity import the right of access to the court, was as near to an absolute right as any which could be envisaged.

To abrogate that right Parliament had to make it plain beyond doubt to the reader of a statute that the provision in question prevented him from going to court for that was what would be required. Section 130 contained nothing to alert the reader to such a possibility.

In his Lordship's judgment, the effect of the 1996 Order was to bar absolutely many persons from seeking justice from the courts. Access to the courts was a constitutional right: it could only be denied by the government if it persuaded Parliament to pass legislation which specifically, in effect by express provision, permitted the executive to turn people away from the court door.

Paul Magrath, Barrister

* This is the last law report for the Hilary Term. Law reports resume at the beginning of the Easter Term, on 8 April.

Births, Marriages & Deaths

DEATHS

DUNCAN: George, peacefully, in Tours, France, 19 February 1997. The funeral will be held at his home in the UK, his strength and conviction continue to support them. A memorial service has been arranged to celebrate and give thanks for his life.

ANNOUNCEMENT: for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Deaths, Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries). In Memoriam: should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 11th Floor, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephone 0171-293 2011 (24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2013) or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Queen carries out engagements in the City of Nottingham here. The Prince of Wales, on behalf of the Queen, holds an investiture at Buckingham Palace; and a President, the Prince's Trust attends the British Telecom Swimming at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London SW1. The Duke of York, the Earl of Wessex, the Earl of Wessex, the Queen at the Year of Engineering Services Exhibition, the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.

Changing of the Guard

The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, Ham.

Birthdays

Lord Boston of Faversham, QC, former chairman, TPS Entertainment, 72; Mr Peter Brook, theatrical producer, 72; Dr Clark Brundin, President, Templeton College, Oxford, 66; Mr Brian Clough, former football manager, 62; Mrs Ann Clywd MP; Mr Timothy Dalton, actor, 51; Miss Gwen Davies, former Headmistress, St Swithun's School, Winchester, 71; Ms Lin Golding MP, 61; Professor Richard Hare, former Professor of Moral Philosophy, Oxford, 78; Mr David Heathcoat-Amory MP, 48; Mr Michael Heseltine MP, First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister, 64; Mr Antony Hopkins, composer and conductor, 71; Mr Frederic Horne, former Chief Tasting Master of the Supreme Court

One last bad day for a bad Parliament

You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!

The words are Oliver Cromwell's, delivered to the "Rump Parliament" of 1653, but as we watched the final televised session of Prime Minister's Questions for the Parliament of 1992-97 yesterday, they seemed unavoidably right. It was a wretched, mean-spirited navel-gazing disgrace of an exchange. The leader of the Opposition tried to get the Prime Minister to hasten publication of a report on sleaze, which Mr Blair hoped would be useful to Labour in the election. Mr Major responded with his own torrent of bitter counter-accusations. The Prime Minister, as he reminds us in tones of injured innocence, has been smeared during his time in office. Yesterday he reminded the whole country that he too can be a sly and loquacious sneerer himself. It was not a pretty sight.

Worse, the exchanges were a fitting end to the Parliament as a whole. The main domestic political events of these years, from the bitter Conservative struggle over European Union, including Major's resignation and retaking of the Tory leadership, to Blair's remaking of Labour, have taken place outside the Chamber and precincts of Westminster. The most memorable quotes and exchanges have occurred in television or radio studios. The most constitutionally significant interventions, though sanctioned by Par-

liament, have been made not by elected Members but by Sir Richard Scott and Lord Nolan. It has been left to the Commons to process legislation, sometimes effectively, and to provide the news bulletins with the pre-digested verbal goblets known as soundbites.

The story of the Commons as an institution in these years has been dominated by "sleaze", a word which has entered the national vocabulary since 1992 with a force and frequency it never had before. Let us enter, at once, all the usual disclaimers and caveats – most MPs are honest, foreigners are mostly worse, and some of the business accusers of politicians are no angels themselves. All that said, the envelope-stuffing tendency has left its imprint on a whole cohort of British politicians. This has been a Conservative problem, partly because the Conservatives have been in power. Labour, belying its reputation as the anti-blood sports party, has careered along behind in gleeful mood. Yet Labour also, with its little local difficulties in Doncaster and elsewhere, and after its national wooing of party-helping business tycoons, has still to prove to the country that all its people would be different.

More important than all that, however, has been the lack, during the 1992-97 Parliament, of the two essential elements in a successful representative democracy – brave leadership and real debate. Leadership has been lacking, in particular, over Europe. The real running



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has been made by dissident Tory MPs, whose campaign against the EU and their own Cabinet has been ferociously energetic and breathtakingly successful; and by Thatcherite commentators and editors in the Tory press. They have helped turn public opinion around while the chosen leaders of the Conservative Party, including the Prime Minister, have dithered and prevaricated. Mr Major's negotiating stance at Maastricht will be remembered as a wise, far-sighted achievement, and a signal service to his country. But retreating, month by month, before a Euro-hostile movement which grew in self-confidence with every backward

step he took was no service. Without one man, Kenneth Clarke, who courageously refused to follow fashion, that retreat would have become a disastrous rout.

Nor, if the job of politicians is to challenge public prejudice and offer new visions, has the leadership of New Labour, so far, been hugely impressive. The party modernisers have bravely and ruthlessly saved their own political machine from its own statist instincts. But they have not addressed the country so boldly. From social policy to economics, the agenda of the Conservatives has been more echoed than confronted. This, we think, will change if Blair wins on 1 May. Every-

thing will be subtly but essentially altered, and Britain will shift direction. Yet it cannot be said that the Labour front bench led for Britain in any striking way during the Parliament just ending.

What about debate? There are very hard arguments to be had in this country – over the great car culture and the environment; over monetary union; over the clash between individual choice and mass dismay at what science makes possible; over drugs, censorship, violence and how we treat children. Far too few of these, we feel, have raged passionately in the Commons. Our MPs have spoken cautiously, nicely, often to an almost empty chamber, following party lines, and getting truly angry only when their own privileges or honour are under debate. They have been suited careerists, without sufficiently wide ambitions, not conscious enough of their possible leadership role in the Britain of the late Nineties. Earlier this year, some of them were huffing and puffing about the admittedly rancorous and sound-bitten Granada television debate on the future of the monarchy. One of the reasons that happened is that they themselves would never have dared to debate such matters. So while we admire many individual MPs, feel affection for others, and recognise a mass of honest and hard-working individuals, say again, with Oliver: you have sat too long.

Let those who return in a few weeks reflect on the failures of our Parliament Past. Let them remember that every

cheap, sneering exchange that defaces Prime Minister's Questions lowers the Commons a little further in importance; that even a few, very slightly, corrupt MPs can corrupt the reputation of politics absolutely; and that a chamber which fails to debate the serious things the country is worried about becomes ignored and unreported. Yesterday was a bad day near the end of a Parliament. Away with all to the hustings – and come back, washed by democracy, cleaner, sharper and – frankly – better than you were.

Life beyond the Internet

Dear a.pupil@gobbledegook.co.uk. Welcome to the future. The Internet is it, so log on, get computer literate and become a highly paid, creative info-worker in the 21st century. You won't need books, because you can look up anything you need on the Net, or on a CD-Rom. Fiction? That's all about stuff that didn't really happen, isn't it? Education is a serious matter of preparing our nation to compete in the global economy. Or so it would seem from Tony Blair's plans to give every child their own e-mail address. Of course, we welcome the report commissioned by the shadow Prime Minister. But let's not forget about learning to speak, write and reason.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Now for the West Lothian Answers

Sir: In Andrew Marr's discussion of the devolution question (19 March), as in Robin Cook's recent remarks on the subject, the same automatic dismissal of the possibility of an English assembly appears. No counter-arguments are produced; Andrew Marr merely dubts it "Utopian".

I have an explanation for this absence of argument. To accept an English assembly would be for the first time to acknowledge the equality of Scotland, Wales, and England. It would be to throw off the last imperialist illusion.

I believe as a patriotic Englishman that an English assembly would be a reviving proposal, which would have the same effect on Wales and Scotland without any danger of sliding into fascist nationalism, since a common valuing of the differences of each would emerge in this late historical admission of equality, this last surrender of old colonialism.

This both solves the West Lothian Question in the very best way and also gets rid of the British Empire at long last. It is that which is still a block to a true valuation and development of our English national culture. It would not break up the United Kingdom. On the contrary, the refusal to countenance equality is what would lead to its collapse.

Dr EDMOND WRIGHT
Cambridge

Sir: Andrew Marr, for solid reasons, rules out the two most widely canvassed solutions to the West Lothian Question: decreasing the number of Scots MPs and a fully-fledged federal system for the UK. He pins his faith on a reformed electoral system which would reduce the differences between the historic nations of Britain.

This raises the question as to how much of the pressure for devolution for Scotland and Wales actually arises from feelings of suppressed national identity and how much is due to a reaction against the neo-liberal hegemony which has been imposed on the Union largely from a political base heavily biased towards the Home Counties.

If a new, more widely based political consensus was established, whether by electoral reform or by a substantial Labour victory, we might predict that the present silence of the "national question" in British politics would be reduced. This might also open up the possibility of pursuing other options for devolution, such as returning power to cities and regions and revitalisation of local communities through urban neighbourhood and rural parish councils with real powers.

In a few years' time we may view the present high profile of national devolution and its infamous accompanying question as a passing phase – another unwelcome consequence of unbridled laissez-faire.

SIMON PARKER
London N2



Although a number of measures to reduce workload have been introduced (for example, increased clerical assistance), the vast majority of the reduction in junior doctor hours has been achieved by an alteration in working practice – "on-call" less frequently but with a much greater patient responsibility. We need more radical solutions if health care is to improve.

(1) An expanded role for nursing staff. This is already happening to a small degree. The reason it is not more widespread is related to monetary considerations and entrenched views. Most of us know that such staff would provide an excellent service to the public, as long as they receive support from medical staff and management.

(2) Re-evaluating the role of the hospital consultant. At present, early assessment of the acutely unwell patient is rarely by the hospital consultant. Are hospital consultants lazy? Certainly not; they are among the hardest-working professionals in our society. Do they dislike patients? Again, certainly not; although some enjoy their detachment from the "coal face", the majority relish patient contact. So what keeps them from the bedside? An increasing amount of their time is dedicated towards improving or even maintaining the service they provide. The reason for this is the system of health service management with which we are now shackled; a management against which consultants are continually battling to hold their corner. Changes in training have provided the opportunity for consultants to be involved in the primary care of patients in hospital. Given support from management and the right

environment, this could be achieved.

Rather than a time of gloom, we are presented with the opportunity to rethink our health service.

Maybe in five years' time a sick child presenting to the accident and emergency department will be assessed promptly by a senior doctor and, if admission is necessary, moved quickly to the ward for treatment by a well-trained nurse. Maybe this would even save money!

Dr KEVIN SOUTHERN
Paediatric Research Fellow
St James's University Hospital, Leeds

High point of the political cycle

Sir: Your choice of the Tour de France as a metaphor for the election campaign (leading article, 18 March) may be more apt than you think. In the 1996 Tour, Miguel Indurain, the five-times winner of the event, predicted that he would win, but was beaten by a fit young upstart. I live in hope.

CARLTON REID
Editor, 'Cycle Industry'
Newcastle upon Tyne

Sir: Polly Tynbbee ("Don't let them tell you it doesn't matter who wins", 18 March) says that when listening to Labour we must "trust that they are lying through their teeth".

This is my father's paradox of Epimenes the Cretan, who said that all Cretans were liars. If he was

lying, he was telling the truth; but if he was telling the truth, he was lying. It took my father 10 years to crack this paradox. If Polly Tynbbee can do it in less, she is a better philosopher than my father was.

EARL RUSSELL
House of Lords
London SW1

Sir: Your article "Movers and shakers line up to support main parties" (18 March) suggested that the Chief Rabbi has given his support to the Labour Party. That is untrue and without foundation. The Chief Rabbi, as a matter of principle, never endorses political parties or leaders and maintains a strict political neutrality.

SYMA WEINBERG
Office of the Chief Rabbi
London N12

Sir: Can anyone explain what a soapbox is? I was born in 1909, so have been around for a long time and have never encountered one. Where did John Major get his?

JEAN MATHESON
Newark, Nottinghamshire

Sir: The news that a further 2.5 million homes could be able to choose their gas supplier in October ("Lang speeds up gas price competition", 18 March) is hailed as a victory for the industry regulator.

All the evidence is that the new

gas suppliers in the domestic market are courting predominantly middle- and higher-income homeowners who pay for their fuel by direct debit. Competition is based solely on price, with no evidence of more efficient use of energy, or of action to promote this.

Meanwhile, consumers who use prepayment meters for home heating continue to be denied access to the benefits of competition. They may be predominantly on low incomes and living in the poorest housing, but they do pay in advance for their gas. Yet on average the new gas suppliers charge these people 20 per cent more for their gas than a customer on direct debit (and up to 34 per cent more).

Those who find it hardest to pay are charged the most. This is the unacceptable face of competition.

ANDREA COOK
Director, National Energy Action
Newcastle upon Tyne

Sir: To my knowledge, Hamish McRae ("Slimmer governments under pressure to do more with less", 18 March) is the first publicly to identify one of Europe's best-kept secrets: the economic prowess of the Netherlands. It is said to set an example to Germany and France. Why not to the UK?

The Netherlands has signed up

pragmatically to Maastricht. That also means the Social Chapter – yet

its unemployment is lower than ours (a fact Tony Blair's propaganda could never acknowledge).

Even though in general wages are higher there (I envy my opposite number in the Netherlands, who earns at least a third more than I do, while costs and household expenditure are scarcely different), its per capita inward investment is, if not higher than ours, then pretty close to it – something else the Tories carefully conceal from us by concentrating on the inward investment total.

Apart from less dogmatic national management and a decentralised political system, some reasons for the Netherlands' success evident to any visitor are a better-educated population, a sense of citizenship as partnership at all levels of society, and pleasure taken in the present and the potential of the future – all in sharp contrast to what we find in Britain. Quick – look the other way or we may have to learn a few lessons.

RODEN RICHARDSON
London SE7

Dutch secret of economic success

Sir: To my knowledge, Hamish McRae ("Slimmer governments under pressure to do more with less", 18 March) is the first publicly to identify one of Europe's best-kept secrets: the economic prowess of the Netherlands. It is said to set an example to Germany and France. Why not to the UK?

The Netherlands has signed up

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Gas prices to fall – for the well-off

Sir:

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The evidence is that the new

gas suppliers in the domestic market are courting predominantly middle- and higher-income homeowners who pay for their fuel by direct debit. Competition is based solely on price, with no evidence of more efficient use of energy, or of action to promote this.

Those who find it hardest to pay are charged the most. This is the unacceptable face of competition.

ANDREA COOK
Director, National Energy Action
Newcastle upon Tyne

Quick dip

Sir:

"Dip" can also refer to the speed at which a person or object travels – "He went at a good dip". I have never heard it used of dropping crockery, which does not mean that R Pugh (letter, 18 March) is wrong, but I never use "drop" in that context. The correct word is "fall", as in "You mind you don't fall our Man's best cup when you do (sic) the dishes." The dialects of South Wales vary greatly over even very short distances.

The Very Rev JOHN ROGERS
Llandaff, Cardiff

Sir: Mrs Johnson (letter, 19 March) was told she must not breast-feed her baby while travelling on a British Rail line since taken over by Virgin West Coast. I challenge Richard Branson to become the first rail magnate to introduce a baby-friendly carriage on his trains. Imagine how much easier it would be to travel if children had somewhere appropriate to play and be fed, changed, etc. on long journeys.

STEPHEN GRAY
Berwick upon Tweed

Retune your stereotypes

Sir: God spare us Channel 5 reruns yet another onslaught from BBC people like Dennis Barden ("God spare us the Channel 5 rerun", 17 March). As everybody knows, we take pride and delight in insulting your family, disrupting your video and smashing your ornaments, leaving you without television, food, shelter or hope for months on end.

It might be nice to hear of the millions of reruns carried out without incident, bringing a new channel at no cost. It would be nicer still to read of the countless unofficial favours performed, resolving minor reception problems or demystifying the instruction book for customers. How many viewers enjoy better reception of Channel 4 or BBC South following my visit is anybody's guess, but they must number hundreds by now.

But no, all we get is constant grief. With monotonous regularity I get called out to people intent on blaming Channel 5 and me personally for every bit of atmospherics, every unsuppressed car that drives past, or their own inability to set the video timer.

MARK PARKER
Maidenhead,
Berkshire

Sir: Dennis Barden was most unfortunate with his Channel 5 rerun. My rerun was courteous, efficient and speedy. None of the equipment was damaged and there was no interference on any channel – except Channel 5, which looks like coloured corduroy. But who cares? The programme previews accompanying the test transmission don't tempt me anyway!

JOHN HAMPSON
Thirsk,
North Yorkshire

2 5 8 0 4 5 7 0 1 3 7 0

Nature and the Salisbury bypass

Sir: Your report "Bypass cost to nature is too high" (19 March) suggests that the Highways Agency has backed English Nature in saying that the impacts of the Salisbury bypass are unacceptable from a nature conservation point of view. This is not so. The Highways Agency has submitted a factual report on various matters referred to it by the Secretaries of State. This includes an appendix to a report by English Nature, but the Highways Agency has expressed no opinion on English Nature's views, apart from on purely technical matters.

Copies of the agency's report will now be sent to interested parties to allow them to comment.

Sir GEORGE YOUNG
Secretary of State for Transport
Department of Transport
London SW1

Virgin challenge

Sir: Mrs Johnson (letter, 19 March) was told she must not breast-feed her baby while travelling on a British Rail line since taken over by Virgin West Coast. I challenge Richard Branson to become the first rail magnate to introduce a baby-friendly carriage on his

essay

Believe it or not, people in this country do still make things. Why? Because they're mad. Jonathan Glancey fills up his Jaguar and goes in search of what's left of British excellence

The Great Western Designer Outlet Village opens this week. It replaces Swindon railway works, which for more than a century built some of Britain's finest locomotives - Cities, Saints, Stars, Halls, Manors, Granges, Castles, Kings - and was a world-famous centre of British engineering and workmanship. Swindon's transformation is a paradigm of the decline and fall of traditional British manufacturing, and the Great Western Designer Outlet Village a mirror in which we see reflected the inexorable rise of a nation of incurable shopaholics.

Manufacturing accounts for just 20 per cent of the British economy's output in 1997. Perhaps this suits us well; perhaps those 150 years during which Britain was the workshop of the world were no more and no less than a polluted hillock on the historical landscape. How much nicer the countryside is becoming now that so many of our clothes are made in sweatshops in India, the Philippines and Central America, and our cars in Japan, Korea and Malaysia. We like to consume, not to make. We are increasingly a nation of couch potatoes rather than a workshop of active producers.

This year, Brush Electrical Machinery of Loughborough will make a handful of locomotives for the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle car-ferry service, but the only important order for main-line locomotives in Britain is one from Wisconsin Central, the US railroad corporation that, since the privatisation of British Railways, runs our national rail-freight network. The 250 diesel-electrics are to be made by General Motors in Ontario.

There is just one other main-line locomotive - Tornado -



In praise of the oily rags

under construction, in Doncaster, birthplace of Mallard and The Flying Scotsman. Tornado is an exact replica of a 1948 A1 Pacific, a 100mph, 3,000hp express passenger steam locomotive which will earn its keep pulling enthusiasts' specials. Its construction is symbolic of contemporary British attitudes to heavy engineering. We think it outdated, the stuff of museums and theme-park displays.

The country that invented the railway locomotive has all but abandoned it. And manufacturing along the way do we want to make anything in 1997 that requires physical effort, oily hands and the desecration of what could be a cosy countryside? In his provocative book *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Penguin, 1981) Martin Wiener, an American historian, argued that an obsession with social betterment and snobbery sapped Britain's industrial vigour. The children of industrial magnates were packed off to public schools, had the classics beaten into them, built

country houses and idled their lives away chasing foxes and passing the port. Today, few pukka middle-class graduates venture into industry. For many, their dream is a well-paid job doing something "creative", a fashionable flat in town and a super place in the country to play latter-day milords and ladies. They are the pages of *Country Life* come to life.

With these reflections in mind, I decided to find out why anyone could still be bothered to manufacture anything that could be called industrial, when the world of arts, culture, property, leisure and financial services beckon with their promise of social prestige, easy money and manicured hands. So I filled up the twin tanks of my V12 Jaguar Sovereign - a car built on the scale of a locomotive, during Jaguar's brief spell of independence between the dead hand of British Leyland and the vital grip of Ford - and set out in search of what remains of our industrial landscape. This took me along highways and byways lined with the visually obnoxious of theme-park displays.

I actually quite enjoy what we're doing," says a tentative Joseph Connolly, managing director of Connolly Leather,

supplier of seat covers to Jaguar, and to hansom cabs and broughams before the carriage went horseless.

Quite enjoy running a tannery in Canterbury and a leather works in Wimborne in the face of stampeding foreign competition? Come, come Mr Connolly.

"Well, I certainly don't want to be the member of the family who closes down the business father and grandfather fought for. Father died of a heart attack right here in the factory. Can't let him down, can I?"

Yes, he can. Sir John Betjeman famously turned his back on the family firm, Betjeman &

Connolly, which made cabinets and costly gewgaws for Aspreys.

The decision broke his father's heart. It also produced a future poet laureate and one of Britain's best-loved authors.

Portrait of a Dead Man, a poem in memory of the father he spurned, was one of the best Beijerman wrote.

I turn to Joseph's younger

brother and fellow director, Tim, and cut leather, craft sports cars, extrude steel and set the world's finest aero-engines whirring into life. Stiff and suspicious at first, they wanted to talk statistics, investment strategies, marketing initiatives, and arcane MBA management stuff, but what I wanted to know, and finally got from them, is why they continued to go to so much bother to make things in noisy factories for relatively little profit when they should be, if the Wiener theory holds up, riding to bounds or dabbling in the arts.

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Yes, he can. Sir John Betjeman famously turned his back on the family firm, Betjeman &

Phoning in sick from the sexual revolution

"So are five orgasms really better than one?" screams *Company* magazine. A stupid question, one might feel, but in the current "less is more" climate that governs everything from politics to cuisine, you never can tell. Quality rather than quantity is the order of the day.

There is, you will be pleased to hear, a flipside to a clutch of climates. The most important thing, apparently, is to do it with someone you love. This may explain why four out of 10 women prefer to remain celibate, according to the 1995 General Household survey. Either there are not enough men of a suitable calibre, or we don't love them enough.

Before we proclaim celibacy as the new rock'n'roll, we might question how honest the respondents to the survey were in the first place. As the age group ranged from 16 to 49, we may assume that there were some who lied about how much sex they were having. Yet the figures are backed up by detailed questions about contraceptive use.

Experts are being wheeled in to figure out how this tragedy could have afflicted the nation's women. Presumably it hasn't afflicted the nation's men, or the 60 per cent of single women who aren't celibate, and are having up to four times a week. But how could four in 10 girls be just saying no when we have assumed they were always saying yes? How could they turn their noses up at that trivial pursuit? Are these women the conscientious objectors in the war between the sexes? Would they really have a cup of tea? Could the Spice Girls really be all mouth and no underwear?

It may be hard for a sexually obsessed culture to contemplate, but perhaps we have had enough. We have heard so much read to us, seen so much sex that we cannot be bothered to take our interest in the real thing anymore.

We have had buckets of sex in order to liberate ourselves, sex to become emotionally healthy, sex to burn off excess calories, sex to prove we can have one-night stands, sex to cement relationships, casual sex, serious sex, sex in faraway places, sex with the boy next door.

We are all tollers in the great sex industry. After all this sexual experimentation, our conclusions are rather mundane — sex is usually better with someone who like than someone you don't. Sex may be preferable to bad sex. At certain times and for certain people, sex is more important than at others.

I find the news of these sexual shirkers, the "abstainers", those "brave souls" who have phoned in sick in the sexual revolution, rather heartbreaking. What willpower it must require to ignore the messages beamed out at us from every poster, magazine, advert, film and television screen.

"No sweat! Great sex, less effort" (*Marx*); "Secret life of a sex addict" (*Elle*); "Aliens forced me to have sex" (*More!*) are just a selection of headlines from magazines aimed at young women. *Company* has a feature on women who are "bastards". One such bastard is Maria, who slept with "five complete strangers" on holiday in Greece last summer. Sleep is a peculiar euphemism for such an up-front magazine.

"Rupert was tall and dark and had great teeth." Bloke 4 was not impressive — "I actually fell asleep during sex because I was so

pissed, and to be honest, the sex was crap." Keith farewelled a bit better, but once back in London, "it was a case of been there, done that, time to move on. And without a tan he didn't look half as good".

Is Maria really a "bastard", an example of girl power, a wannabe *Girls* Show presenter, a ladette who is "mad for it", a model of sexual liberation, a refuter of double standards?

She may be none or all of these things, she may not even exist, but as a role model she is too sorely dated to be worth aspiring to. The days when such behaviour would have marked her out as a sexual pioneer have long gone — they belonged to the Seventies, the era of Erica Jong's "zippy fuck". I care not whether Maria has sex with five or 50 men a week — if it makes her happy; if it doesn't, she may as well stick to aero-

I suspect the abstainers may know what makes them happy. Or they may simply view sex as being about more than physical need. Women, accustomed to increased choice in every area of their lives, are making choices in this department, too. Contraception has freed us up, work has given us independence. Many women view sex as part of a deal; not as the deal itself. They want partners to fit in with a lifestyle they have prepared earlier, instead of changing their lives around when they meet a man.

The facade of a successful partnership — the dinner parties, the mini-breaks, the public world of coupledom — is as important as what goes on behind closed doors. Women's refusal to compromise means increased business for dating agencies and marriage guidance counsellors. Sex, in this model, is a perk of the job of coupledom, rather than an earth-shattering experience.

Men are simply not up to it. Or so it has been claimed. As my friend's mother always says, "If you find a good man, shoot him before he goes off".

They are confused poor things, and so are we. Sex is power one minute and play the next, imbued with mystical significance for some, a mechanism for release for others. In a sexually saturated culture, its currency has become devalued. "Shagging" and "hooking" are infantile expressions, holiday-camp activities, that make sex mean nothing. This may be the apothecary of sexual liberation, but it doesn't pan out like that because too many of us still want sex to mean something.

If some women are shrinking their responsibility to be sexually active at all times, it may be because they have liberated themselves from the idea that they can only be defined within the context of a sexual relationship. Celibacy may not be new, but it is still considered shocking in an era of compulsory sex-activity. The abstainers may, like everyone else, talk about it more than they do it, for if there is a moral in the talk it is this: our biggest sexual fantasy is the enduring one that everyone else in the world has more sex than we do.

Want to mean something. If some women are shrinking their responsibility to be sexually active at all times, it may be because they have liberated themselves from the idea that they can only be defined within the context of a sexual relationship. Celibacy may not be new, but it is still considered shocking in an era of compulsory sex-activity. The abstainers may, like everyone else, talk about it more than they do it, for if there is a moral in the talk it is this: our biggest sexual fantasy is the enduring one that everyone else in the world has more sex than we do. Better start fantasising less.

Suzanne Moore

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Germany and stability in Europe



Helmut Kohl's domination has ended with a bang and Europe is now a problem. Seeking to be tied down lest the jackboot reappear is a poor kind of fatalism, says David Walker

Klaus Kinkel, the German foreign minister, says he wants to spread "the German culture of stability" to the rest of Europe. This must be the famous German sense of humour. Stability? Nearly five million Germans officially unemployed, a figure not seen since Heinrich Brüning was Chancellor in 1931 — and guess who was his successor but one?

Stability, when striking miners refuse to get their tanks off Helmut Kohl's lawn and extract from him yet further subsidies for a coal industry where every single ton costs the taxpayer 200 DM (280) — around 10 times its world market value.

This is the Germany where a secret report says a third of the railway network needs to be cut, the steel industry heavily rationalised and health care sharply reformed. Where the pension system is stacking up liabilities at an unsustainable rate but where the governing coalition can do nothing without the assent of the opposition (who control the upper chamber of parliament) and they won't play ball.

Oh yes, and this is a country where some Germans give prizes to foreign authors of books alleging virtually the entire nation had complicity in the extermination of European Jewry at the same time as others (including some senior members of Chancellor Kohl's coalition partners, the Christian Social Union) deplore the public exhibition of pictures containing incontrovertible evidence that the German army was an active perpetrator of atrocities across Europe.

Stability, Herr Kinkel, when the only chance the unemployed have is for the Bundesbank, currently

repentant after having subjected Germany to masochistically hard levels of currency appreciation a couple of years ago, allows the Deutsche Mark to soften ... something of a paradox in the context of the Euro.

Germany is, in short, in a bit of a mess. The era of Chancellor Kohl's dominance ended with a bang last week: the Christian Democratic Union is scrambling for the succession stakes.

Kohl's great work — reunification — still casts a shadow: the east German economy is far from sorted, and public finances will long bear scars.

But it is important, especially for us, the British, with all our historical baggage, to understand just what the German malady amounts to. It does not mean the end of *Vorsprung durch Technik*. At the same time as the miners were demonstrating in Bonn and Berlin last week the regular Cebit techno-fair opened in Hannover. German enthusiasm for the Internet is burgeoning; the idea that Germany is not going to be a major player in new technologies won't wash.

What Germany needs is a dose of "Thatcherism" in the sense it needs to move away from old staples such as coal and steel and probably also away from the generous assumptions which underpinned the "social market economy" (a creation, let it not be forgotten, of the conservatives Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard).

How well will German politics cope? If they can select a leader with more appeal than Oskar Lafontaine, the Social Democrats must be in with a chance for the national elections due next year. Then it would be down to them, out of power since the early Eighties, to deal with the unions,

welfare, tax reforms, and (since they might need the greens as coalition partners) the environment.

It is a heavy list. But those who spend their time examining the entrails of German democracy for signs of failure and incipient fascism are going to be disappointed. The German political system is in rude health. Functioning federalism which can still happily embrace cultures as different as those of Bavaria and the Saarland is one of the glories of the postwar constitution.

The real German problem is Europe. This is apparent in the sense that Maastricht and EMU have been allowed to become arbiters of the fate of significant politicians, not just Chancellor Kohl but also the CSU leader and finance minister Theo Waigel and many of their colleagues, too. At this stage in the economic cycle, with unemployment as high as it is, German leaders need extensive room for manoeuvre. Instead they have allowed the European "project" to box them in. Read my lips, Herr Waigel says: 3 per cent is 3 per cent — referring to the maximum German budget deficit for EMU entry.

But how will the Kohl government reach it? Buying off the miners will cost millions of marks. Tax revenues are running below expectations. EMU involves the end of the Deutsche Mark — the destruction of two great sources of German postwar identity. And in aid of what? It is too easy to reply in terms of Chancellor Kohl's personal European aspirations. It is not just him. The silence of the opposition and the trade unions on EMU is even more telling — mildly critical remarks by the SPD leader Gerhard Schröder

are treated as revolutionary.

When Theo Waigel went to Brussels last week he complained about contributing the equivalent of £7.5bn a year to the EU budget, on top of Germany's huge direct contributions to regeneration in eastern Europe.

"These are things we are doing not for Germany but for Europe" he said.

But why? Why this clinging to a European scheme which may be preventing German adaptation and reform, may be stopping Germans asserting legitimate self-interest? It is because Europe stops Germans having to think about their future as a nation. You can hear it from young intellectuals or old CDU hacks. They talk about merging Germany into Europe. We cannot handle a "Europe of Fatherlands" said a leading intellectual the other day because we would be bounced back into Greater German aspirations. It is a version of the Old Adam argument: tie us down, pin us in or else democratic forces will force us to put our jackboots on.

It is a poor argument, embodying a dangerous kind of fatalism. Europe will never wash away German history or German nationality. In his speech after awarding Daniel Goldhagen the Democracy Prize for his book *Hilfer's Willing Executioners*, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas said the Germans were too taken by this kind of pessimistic historicism. What happened in the Thirties and Forties was the result of a one-off concatenation of ideas and mind sets.

Europe may even be an impediment to the Germans realising what they have accomplished post-war, and rejoicing that they have it in themselves to solve their own problems.



Ten reasons why Blair can't afford to relax

by Donald Macintyre

It's been Labour's week again. First, *The Sun* transforms the landscape by bashing Tony Blair. Then the Tories are put huge on cash for parliamentary questions — overshadowing one of the best ever monthly wins in unemployment. In hand-to-hand fighting for the headlines the Tories have already suffered heavy losses, and the campaign has scarcely begun.

So it seems eccentric to suggest that Labour, around 20 points ahead in the polls, has any reasons for anxiety. If anything, its support seems to be hardening. But that's just it. Both parties are deeply suspicious of the size of the poll lead and, ironically, both would probably like them to narrow to what Labour regards as a real gap closer to 10 per cent. The Tories, so that they can improve morale and promise the kind of real fight that the electorate and press would like; Labour so that it would inject a more realistic view of the work that still needs to be done.

So for hubristic Labour candidates and party workers here are 10 potential problems to worry about:

1. The reverse incumbency factor. The bright lights are now on Labour. Because of the widespread assumption that Blair will win, significantly more interest is being shown in Labour's policy proposals by the media and by the Tories themselves, now effectively fighting the election as an opposition party. Earlier this week the *Evening Standard* put 50 questions about Labour's programme to the party. When asked why the same proposals were not being put to the Tories, the reply came back: "because no one thinks they're going to win."

2. Money. John Major's biography, the historian Anthony Seldon, has listed nine factors for why Tory governments fall — ranging from party disunity and a negative image of the leader to feeling that it is time for a change. Major's government displays eight out of the nine. The one that doesn't is money. Tories won't say how much they have got but Labour puts the figure at £40m compared to £12m of its own. This means much more for newspaper advertising, direct mail shots and telephone canvassing.

3. TV debates. Labour strategists are quietly confident that debates will work to Blair's advantage, but several senior Tories believe they will help Major. And as the first in British political history they cannot fail to inject an whiff of danger into an otherwise heavily programmed campaign. At present both the BBC (front man: David Dimbleby) and ITV (Jonathon Dimbleby) are proposing two 90-minute Sunday night debates, with an expected audience of 15 million, in mid-campaign. Blair and Major would confront each other, with Ashdown being grilled separately. But Labour's policy proposals by the media and by the Tories themselves, now effectively fighting the election as an opposition party. Earlier this week the *Evening Standard* put 50 questions about Labour's programme to the party. When asked why the same proposals were not being put to the Tories, the reply came back: "because no one thinks they're going to win."

4. Europe: The shuffle by the Cabinet in January when it agreed that a single currency was "highly unlikely" followed by an amber light to candidates opposing the single currency outright has meant that many Tory candidates are running their own campaigns without reference to Central Office.

5. Major has less to lose. and Major has less to lose.

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7. The landside factor — the risk of a counter-swing against Labour once electors start seriously translating the poll lead into a 1906-style majority. As the Tories point out, Labour's planned constitutional changes are for ever — and just until the next Tory government takes over. One way of preventing that is stamping on the related problem of ...

sons of competition and party because of the old adage that the best commercial position for newspapers is to be Tory at times of a Labour government. The main danger among activists is a feeling that now *The Sun* has switched sides the battle is over bar the shouting. This is a big mistake. It wasn't the Sun who won it in 1992. It had much more to do with Labour's tax plans and Neil Kinnock's unpopularity. Michael Heseltine is straining at the leash to deliver a broadside at foreign newspaper tycoons but Central Office is much more reluctant, probably because huge efforts were made by senior ministers to stop Murdoch doing it.

8. Triumphalist indiscretion. All senior Labour spokesmen need an urgent inoculation against Sheffield syndrome — the ailment which caused Neil Kinnock to lose it at the pre-election rally in 1992. This is one reason why Blair is campaigning in meetings with small groups of voters rather than rub-thumping US-style presidential rallies. Shadow ministers with eyes on Cabinet jobs are particularly susceptible.

9. It's the economy, stupid. It's true that the Tories are suffering from an unprecedented disjunction between economic optimism and their own popularity. But the 1p tax reduction due in April certainly won't harm the Tories.

10. The Max Clifford factor. The effect would probably be limited. But just because *The Sun* has swung to Labour it can't be ruled out that Labour, as well as the Tories, could be hit by prurient sexual revelations before polling day.

The two men most aware that it could yet be a much tougher fight are Blair and Major. Blair starkly warned his MPs this week that "we have a mountain to climb" and that just to get a majority Labour needs its biggest swing since 1945. This doesn't mean that a landside isn't possible. Even a 10 per cent lead would deliver an awe-inspiring 80-seat majority. But it does mean that Labour would be wise to treat the mysterious electoral beast with deep respect all the way to 10pm on Thursday May 1.

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business & city

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Liggett to settle US tobacco lawsuits

David Usborne
New York

The legal equivalent of an earthquake struck the tobacco industry yesterday when the maker of Chesterfield cigarettes was poised to acknowledge formally that smoking was addictive and could cause cancer.

The Liggett Group, the smallest of the main US tobacco companies, was expected to confirm it had negotiated a potentially explosive agreement to settle lawsuits filed against the industry in 22 US states. In return, it would gain immunity in the future from such lawsuits.

Under the deal, which was to be detailed at a press conference in Washington late last night, Liggett would also surrender its

documents to assist the states in pursuing the other tobacco companies and release its employees from any legal constraints from testifying in support of the lawsuits.

The settlement promises to usher in a new phase in the legal struggle in the US over what responsibility should be shouldered by tobacco companies for health problems suffered by smokers. Ultimately, it may force the industry to seek a long-term truce with litigants and the federal government.

Negotiated behind closed doors with the attorneys general of all 22 states in Washington this week, the agreement will oblige Liggett to print new

warnings on its cigarette packs spelling out that smoking is addictive and can cause cancer. Liggett brands also include Eve and L&M cigarettes.

Bennett LeBow, the head of Liggett, was expected to issue a personal statement conceding that cigarettes are addictive and carcinogenic and that the tobacco industry targets young people as potential smokers. While the admission may not appear stunning, it contradicts statements made by all the main tobacco chief executives under oath before Congress in 1994 when they denied smoking was addictive. The Justice Department is investigating whether they lied to Congress.

Under the deal, Liggett will undertake to make a token initial settlement of \$25m (£16m). It will also continue to pay out 25 per cent of its pre-tax profits to the states for 25 years.

Liggett has broken ranks before. A year ago, it reached a settlement with five states and with the litigants in a massive class-action lawsuit that has since fizzled in the courts.

For the rest of the industry, it is Liggett's pledge to assist in the litigants' lawsuits that is most alarming. Shares in tobacco companies slumped yesterday. In New York, shares in Philip Morris were down by more than \$5 at midday to \$116.75. Only a week ago, the same

shares were at \$140. In London, shares in BAT lost 18.5p to 489p in late trading.

Among the documents that Liggett has promised to release are notes from consultations between the legal officers of all the tobacco companies over 30 years. These could be incriminating if they demonstrate a policy of concealing the addictive nature of nicotine.

The deal was hailed by Scott Harsbarger, head of the Association of Attorneys General. "The fallout from this agreement will be felt well into the 21st century and it should end the farce of industry denials about their illegal and deceptive conduct," he said.

It will also be welcomed by anti-smoking advocates. In recent days, advertising signs atop New York City taxi cabs have appeared depicting a stylised Marlboro Man. The posters show a skull under a cowboy hat with a cigarette hanging from its mouth and the slogan: "Welcome to Cancer Country."

Analysts cautioned, however, that Philip Morris and the other main companies may not negotiate settlements. The precise content of the Liggett documents is unknown. Liggett's rivals are also certain to take court action to attempt to block the handing over of the documents on the grounds that they contain privileged information.

failed, was seen as an effort by Mr LeBow to engineer a merger of Liggett and RJ Reynolds.

Hinting at the battle lying ahead over the fate of Liggett's documents, an attorney representing Brown & Williamson, the US subsidiary of BAT, said that for Liggett to surrender them would be "improper".

The battle over tobacco, meanwhile, is broader than just the lawsuits of the 22 states, which alone could ultimately cost the companies billions of dollars. Several US cities, including New York, have launched lawsuits. Additionally there are some 300 lawsuits pending. The Liggett deal would appear to give all litigants substantial new ammunition with which to hit the industry.

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Maker of Chesterfield cigarettes to acknowledge smoking is addictive and can cause cancer

Norwich to hand out £3bn windfall

Clifford German

Around 1.8 million with-profits policy-holders with Norwich Union will each receive a share windfall worth an estimated £720 when the mutual insurance giant floats in June. The free share allocation is wider and more generous than expected, but several million policy-holders with household or motor insurance policies will miss out on the bonanza.

Announcing the details of the £3bn share allocation yesterday, Norwich Union said with-profits policy-holders, including those with endowment mortgages, would receive a minimum of 300 shares, worth an estimated £720.

Slightly more than 1 million members will get more than the minimum, depending on the current value of their policies. The basis of calculation has not yet been published, but there is no maximum award, and policy-holders with large pension funds will get shares worth £10,000 and more.

A further 1.1 million mem-

bers with non-profit policies, which includes anyone with an ordinary life assurance policy, investors in Norwich Union unit trusts, and pensioners with Norwich Union personal pensions, will get a fixed allocation of 150 shares, worth an estimated £380.

Policy-holders living abroad will be eligible for shares and there will be a cash alternative for members living in countries which do not permit share ownership. But the flotation will not benefit ordinary household and motor policy-holders, who are not deemed to be members of the society.

The cut-off date for policies which are eligible is 1 October last year. Any taken out after that date will not qualify for free shares. The proposal must win 75 per cent approval from those voting at an extraordinary general meeting to be held on 18 April.

After the furore caused by second-named account holders missing out on the building society flotation, Norwich also looks set to run into flak after

ruling that each policy relates only to one member.

Where there are two named policy-holders only the first name on the policy will be entitled to shares. The finance director, Richard Harvey, admitted yesterday that many thousands of divorced couples would still have joint policies, and only the first-named would receive the shares.

The shares would currently be worth an estimated 220p-265p each, Norwich Union said. It is raising £1.75bn in new capital in a public share offer at the time of the flotation. The new money will go to pay costs of the float, estimated at £120m. Another £130m will be retained in the general insurance company, and the balance of £1.5bn will be paid into the life assurance fund, and invested in shares and other assets.

Had the group been a public company throughout the past three years, profits would have risen from £404m in 1994 to £581m in 1995 before dropping back to £567m last year.

Assuming a dividend yield of

5 per cent, the group is expected to be valued at over £5bn based on the notional £2.05bn dividend it would have paid last year. That equates to around 1.1

times the embedded value of the life fund, whereas comparable companies are valued at between 1.3 and 1.8 times the embedded value, which suggests the market value of the group after flotation could be in excess of £6bn. It will rank in the top 40 UK companies when dealings begin in June.

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COMMENT

'That the normally trustworthy insurance industry could have perpetrated this mis-selling scandal in the first place is bad enough. Its apparent failure to deal with the compensation issue makes it seem doubly worse.'

Prosser's proposal offers the PIA a way out

Full marks to Legal & General's David Prosser for coming up with a good though not wholly original plan for breaking the pensions mis-selling impasse. But are regulators and others going to deal with it? Will it not be such a reversal and climb down for the Personal Investment Authority that somebody will have to go?

It has not been a good month for Joe Palmer and Collette Bowe, chairman and chief executive respectively of the PIA. First there was the roasting they received from the Commons Treasury Select Committee over the paralysis in attempts to deal with the scandal. Then there was the disclosure that those who have died awaiting compensation outnumber those who have had their cases settled by three to one. Now along comes Mr Prosser with his own way of dealing with the problem. By implication he suggests the PIA's approach may have been flawed all along.

Anything is better than the present shambles and the proposal would certainly seem to deserve serious consideration even if it does involve some loss of face for the PIA. The trouble is that for the time being the PIA is sticking to its guns. We've bent over backwards to accommodate the industry's needs on all this and now they are saying let's start all over again, is the PIA's not unreasonable complaint.

Well maybe, but the truth of the matter is that the present approach is not getting anywhere, and Mr Prosser's proposal would

seem to offer at least the hope of an early solution to what is proving to be an intractable set of problems. The approach pursued by the PIA is the exceeding complex one of getting aggrieved policyholders reinstated into their old pension schemes, which requires a calculation to be made of the shortfall in contributions.

The main difficulty has been persuading the pension funds to play ball, for given that this is not their problem it is for them a low priority.

The beauty of Mr Prosser's approach is that the insurance company doesn't have to wait for the pension funds to calculate the correct amount of compensation. By mirroring the benefit that the pension fund would have paid, it can solve the grievance immediately and settle the detail at leisure.

It should be pointed out that Mr Prosser's motives are not entirely altruistic. The normally trustworthy insurance industry could have perpetrated this mis-selling scandal in the first place is bad enough. Its apparent failure to deal with the compensation issue makes it seem doubly worse.

The damage in public relations terms is incalculable. Mr Prosser's plan offers a way out, a way of saying we've solved this problem even though what the plan actually does is merely buy time in which to settle properly.

Even so, we should not knock the proposal just because it allows the industry to get out of unwanted publicity. As Ms Bowe learned

to her cost at the select committee last week, failure to solve this problem has begun to reflect as badly on the PIA as it has on the industry. It is in everyone's interests that this be settled and the Prosser route seems to provide a rather better answer than the PIA's.

When BAT Industries admitted a couple of weeks ago it would entertain serious offers to settle its US tobacco-related litigation it was clear the industry was preparing to abandon its untenable pretence that cigarettes are not addictive drugs that caused cancer. The defensive chain was only ever going to be as strong as its weakest link and yesterday Liggett snapped.

The proposed deal - a one-off multi-million dollar payment, then an effective 25 per cent tax on profits for 25 years is dramatic enough. The agreement to make available top-secret internal documents showing the tobacco companies knew all along what dangerous narcotics they were peddling is pure dynamite.

No wonder Liggett's rivals have been gasping to their lawyers for injunctions to keep the lid on their deceit. Allowing its employees to testify in the lawsuits against the rest of the industry threatens to open up a grabby and explosive Pandora's box.

Moreover, a personal statement from Liggett head Bennett LeBow that the industry has deliberately targeted young people

as potential smokers and conceding that cigarettes are carcinogenic and addictive seems to imply that chief executives of the major tobacco companies were lying when they swore the precise opposite before Congress in 1994.

Mr LeBow is, of course, working to his own agenda. He is trying to sell Liggett and needs a deal to draw a line under the outstanding litigation, so the business can be valued. The usual rhetoric last night from the company's peers suggests Philip Morris, BAT and the others are not ready to roll over except on their own terms.

What is remarkable about this unfolding drama, however, is the speed with which the terms of the debate are shifting. Only a year ago it would have been inconceivable for any tobacco company to be prepared to flag the addictiveness of its product, let alone put into the public domain documents that could blow a giant hole in the tissue of lies that has sustained the industry for 40 years. The endgame has begun.

Just as patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, so a strong pound is a handy hole for the chairman looking for an excuse to swing the jobs axe. Can it really be the case that British Steel is basing its next five-year plan on the number of deutschmarks you can buy for a pound? If so, then Sir Brian Mofat ought to get out of the steel business fast and go into the for-

ign exchange. With foresight like that he would make killing.

Sadly, he does not possess any such gift. The reality behind the redundancies being spelt out to union leaders today is altogether more prosaic. British Steel was going to impose them anyway, but the spurt in the exchange rate provides a convenient excuse.

In the 1970s it was overmanning that gave British Steel its justification to wield the axe. In the 1980s it was overcapacity. Now it is that blasted exchange rate. German industrialists have grown used to living with a high exchange rate, until recently. When the average British firm is confronted with the same challenge, it induces near panic.

It is true that British Steel is unusually exposed to the £/DM exchange rate. But there is something called hedging and, when that runs out, there is something called management. In any event the relationship between exchange rates and plunging profits is not as linear as the company likes to make out. The seven-fold rise in Steel's profits between 1994 and 1995 confounds Mofat's law, because sterling was stronger on average, not weaker.

The pound is just as likely to be back at DM2.25 in a year's time as up at DM2.85. But either way it will make no difference to the 10,000 or so workers that will be looking for a job outside of a steel mill. Make British industry more competitive by all means, but please, don't use the excuse of the exchange rate.

Soaring pound puts as many as 10,000 workers at risk

Unions warn over massive job cuts at British Steel

Michael Harrison

Union leaders warned British Steel last night that they would resist any compulsory redundancies as the company prepared to spell out its plans for 5,000-10,000 job losses over the next five years.

At a meeting with senior British Steel executives in London today, the unions will be told that job losses will need to rise "significantly" from their current level of 1,000 a year if the company is to maintain its competitiveness in the face of the strong pound and cheap imports.

Meanwhile a Labour MP, Dennis McShane, blamed the cutbacks on the Chancellor's "incompetence in managing the value of sterling" and claimed that the job losses could hit nearly 100 constituencies, some of them marginal Tory seats.

City analysts estimate that about £100m is wiped off British Steel's profits for every 10-pfennig rise in the value of sterling against the German mark, the currency in which steel is traded in Europe.

Profits for the year to the end of March are set to tumble from £1.1bn last year to about £400m-£450m as the pound has appreciated by more than 10 per cent against the mark and some analysts are pencilling in profits for 1997-98 of just £150m.

British Steel spokesman said that it had originally planned to introduce the job losses over a four to eight-year period as part of a wider cost efficiency programme, but it had been brought forward because of the exchange rate threat to its competitiveness.

He stressed that none of the group's four integrated steel plants - Llanwern and Port Talbot in South Wales, Scunthorpe and Teesside - or its engineering steel division in Rotherham was threatened by closure.

But he could not rule out

British Steel's fluctuating fortunes					
Profit (£m)	Output (tonnes)	W/force	Market share (%)	DM/E	Estimated
1992-3 1149	125	46,000	56%	2.85	
1993-4 862	125	41,000	56%	2.40	
1994-5 1,178	124	40,000	56%	2.50	
1995-6 1,102	156	50,000	58%	2.25	
1996-7 490	160	54,000	60%	2.45	

forced redundancies: "Initially, the job cuts will be sought through voluntary means but inevitably there will have to be some compulsory redundancies," he added.

The unions were forewarned of the cutbacks in a letter from the British Steel chairman, Sir Brian Mofat, and will be formally notified of the plans today. The Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union's national officer Bob Shannon said it would seek urgent clarification of the job losses, adding: "We

will resist any attempt at compulsory redundancies."

Keith Brookman, general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, said: "We are extremely concerned about the effects that unfair, illegally subsidised imports and the rising strength of the pound are having on British Steel's profitability and the knock-on effect that had on jobs."

Mr Brookman said the union has been given no specific details of job losses.

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Guinness's price policy makes sense

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Guinness has been bad for its shareholders for years now, but the past six weeks have provided a healthy tonic. Following an upbeat trading statement in January, borne out by yesterday's full-year figures, the Johnnie Walker to stout group's shares have risen almost 20 per cent to yesterday's close of 501.5p from a year's low of 420p. The hangover from the consumer party of the 1980s may not be over, but the head is at last clearing.

The £1bn profit mark remained elusive in 1996, but only, Guinness claimed, because of the extra interest it had to pay to fund last March's share buy-back. That left pre-tax returns at 97.5m, but naturally gave a fillip to earnings per share, which at 34.8p were 19 per cent up on last year's provision-hitting figure and 6 per cent better on a comparable basis. The dividend rise of 8 per cent to 16.1p means the stock has outstripped the rest of the market on that measure over the past five years, if on few others.

The company is plainly on the mend, benefiting from the decision a year or so ago to end the folly of price promotions in its spirits arm in favour of the tried and tested, if expensive, technique of building its enviable portfolio of brands. The first evidence of improvement started to show through in the US last year, where for the first time in ages all Guinness's so-called power brands – Johnnie Walker, Dewar's, Tanqueray and Gordon's – increased volumes. Prices moved ahead too, although the progress is pretty glacial.

Getting the rest of the industry to follow suit on pricing has not been easy and in the competitive home market spirits' profits slipped 9 per cent as the decision to hold the line on prices hit volumes.

It is clearly the right approach, however, and the benefit will start to flow this year. In the rest of the world, volumes moved ahead nicely and developing markets now account for 44 per cent of divisional profits, up from 30 per cent five years ago.

Brewing is doing well as Guinness finally gets to grips with exploiting its stout's unassailable brand around the world. Again, the cost of achieving an 8 per cent rise in draught Guinness volumes was sizeable in marketing terms but last year's advertising sets a nice platform for growth. If beer was the group's dominant product, not mature spirits, it would be set even fairer than it is.

As it is, however, the unresolved problems at Cruzcampo in Spain (where profits of £22m on investment of £900m remain pathetic) and the likely 600m hit from the soaring pound mean Guinness will struggle to do better this year than last. That puts the share up 15.5p yesterday, the face of a tumbling market, on a prospective price/earnings ratio of 15. That is hard

to justify on the basis of profits growth, which is likely to remain pretty pedestrian, but continuing strong cash-flow will ensure that buy-backs will progressively reduce the equity base.

Rugby still struggling

The painful process of managing decline continues at building products group Rugby. In joinery, a net 350 jobs will go as a result of the recent acquisition of Boulton & Paul for an initial £15.5m, with factories closing this week at Boulton-on-Trent and Maldon, Essex.

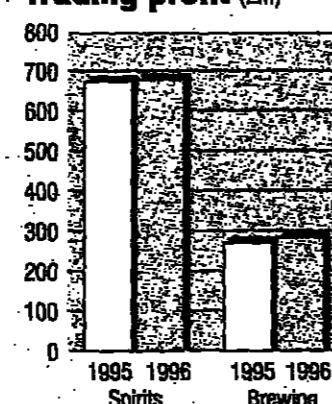
The Boulton & Paul deal made Rugby the biggest supplier of doors in the UK, but buying dominant market share and cost leadership means little in a low-inflation environment where demand is, at best, patchy.

Last year a 2 per cent drop in joinery turnover knocked 35 per cent off pre-exceptional operating profits to £2.1m. While a 2.5 per cent fall in cement volumes dented profits there by 12 per cent to £1.6m.

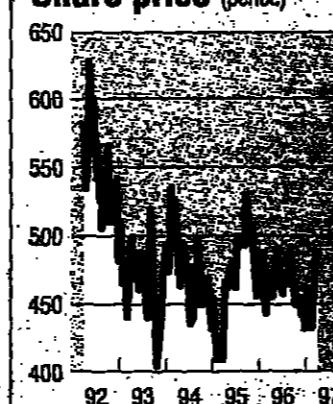
Guinness : At a glance

Market value: £9.47bn, share price 501.5p					
Five year record 92 93 94 95 96					
Revenue (£m)	4,267	4,684	4,692	4,692	4,692
Pre-tax profits (£m)	795	702	915	876	975
Earnings per share (pence)	21.0	22.5	21.8	19.8	21.0
Dividends per share (pence)	11.9	12.8	13.8	14.9	16.1

Trading profit (£m)



Share price (pence)



per cent when it comes on-stream towards the end of 1999. That looks like throwing good money after bad.

And the outlook in the US is just as bad, with the number of housing starts falling and interest rates poised to go up.

Profits of £58m rising to £89m in 1998 put the shares, down 2p at 114p, on a prospective p/e ratio of 16 falling to 12. The discount to the sector is deserved. Unattractive.

Kwik-Fit looks a lot fitter

Kwik-Fit, the fast-fit car parts group founded and run by the fire-breathable Tom Farmer, has done well since its *annus horribilis* five years ago, when profits collapsed, and the high operational gearing which hit the group then should increasingly work in reverse this year.

Certainly the 19 per cent jump in pre-tax profits to £43.3m for the year to February looks creditable against a 17 per cent rise in turnover. However, that increase looked less impressive when account is taken of the £8.2m gain recorded on the sale and lease-back of 40 Kwik-Fit depots, even if it was offset in part by the £5.1m write-off of the development costs of the fledgling insurance broking operation. In fact, the underlying profits growth in the existing business was 5 per cent and overall operating margins were flat at just over 10 per cent.

Mr Farmer, who saw his own pay rise from £94,200 to £112m last year, blamed the margin restraint on a regular five-yearly upgrade of fitters' salaries, which helped boost staff costs by a fifth last year. The absence of that one-off this year should allow a bigger proportion of sales to filter through to the bottom line. And despite the maturity of many of its markets, Kwik-Fit's pursuit of market share has already seen 1996 sales increases ranging from 9 per cent in exhausts to 26 per cent in tyres as it launched into the fleet market.

The group has 50 greenfield sites in the pipeline to add to its current total of 866 fast-fit outlets stretching from Ireland, across the UK to Holland and Belgium. That should take it well on the way to the target of 750 in the UK. But the real excitement lies in insurance broking, which has broken into the black after just 18 months, turning a £900,000 first-half loss into £2m profits in the second six months. The ground is not as fertile as when Direct Line started, but there is clearly plenty of scope to capitalise on the Kwik-Fit brand.

Underlying profits raised 15 per cent to £46m this year would put the shares, up 0.5p at 241p, on a forward multiple of 13. Attractive.

Tesco set to buy Irish supermarkets

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Tesco is on the verge of sealing a £600m deal with Associated British Foods that would give it control of the food group's Irish supermarkets. The deal could be announced as early as today.

Talks between the two parties stalled on Thursday over price but Tesco and ABF returned to the negotiating table yesterday to thrash out terms. "We can confirm that there are ongoing discussions between the board of Tesco and Associated British Foods," Tesco said.

The news emerged as William Morrison, the Yorkshire-based supermarket group, announced plans to create a further 2,250 jobs next year as it opens its first stores in the south of England.

The Tesco deal with ABF would give the UK supermarket giant control of three Irish trading formats – Quinnsborough in Northern Ireland and Stevensons and Crazy Prices in Northern Ireland. Tesco would become the largest supermarket group in Ireland with a market share of between 20 and 30 per cent in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The three groups recorded combined sales of £1.3bn last year and profits of £60m.



The board of Tesco, chaired by Lord Macmillan (above), has been in talks with Associated British Foods

per cent with their greater buying power and economies of scale. However, the market is very competitive, particularly in Northern Ireland, and distribution is tougher because of a poorer network.

Separately William Morrison, the Bradford-based supermarket, announced plans to open its first stores in southern England. Announcing the creation of 2,250 jobs next year Morrison said it would open branches in Erith, Kent, and Banbury, Oxfordshire.

Morrison also announced a 7 per cent increase in pre-tax profits to £135.8m.

National Express hints at further rail job cuts

Michael Harrison

The transport group National Express yesterday hinted at significant job cuts in its passenger rail businesses as it announced that it made a £21m profit last year from the first two train franchises it took over.

The group also disclosed that 4,000 employees of the bus company West Midlands Travel, which it acquired in 1995, will share in a £31m share bonus worth a total of £1.6m of exceptional charges to cover redundancies, up from £7.8m in its last full year in public ownership, the line of 1,400 job losses.

National Express is now Britain's biggest rail operator after winning five of the 25 passenger franchises. It will receive a total of £2.8m in subsidies over the next seven to 15 years.

Midland Mainline, the InterCity service from London's St Pancras, made a £1.6m operating profit in the last eight months of 1996 after receiving £11m of taxpayers' support. The underlying operating loss, excluding £1.8m of exceptional charges to cover redundancies, was £7.6m. In its last full year in public ownership, the line made a loss of £11.6m.

The Gatwick Express line, also taken over last April, made a £500,000 profit after a £4m pay-off. National Express is now Britain's biggest rail operator after winning five of the 25 passenger franchises. It will receive a total of £2.8m in subsidies over the next seven to 15 years.

proceeds to the Government and £900,000 exceptional charges.

National Express has cut about 300 jobs from the two franchises – equivalent to an 18 per cent staff reduction. If it imposes the same level of job cuts at its three new franchises – ScotRail, Central Trains and North London Trains – it could mean a further 1,400 job losses.

Tim White, chief executive, would not be drawn on the precise level of job losses but he said there was significant scope for cost savings.

He was speaking as the group announced a 45 per cent rise in pre-tax profits last year to £10.1m.

Lower share prices shake Newcastle

Patrick Tooher

This week's sharp fall in share prices has heightened concerns among institutional investors about prospects for Newcastle United's stock market flotation and virtually ensured the offer will be priced at the lower end of the indicated price range.

Newcastle's placing, which closes today, aims to raise £47.7m, valuing the Premier League club at between £172m and £195m. The offer to retail investors, aimed mainly at fans, ended yesterday.

But leading fund managers worried about falling equity prices, were last night deciding whether to subscribe or not. "We don't have a view on it yet," said a spokeswoman for one financial institution. "Football clubs are difficult to value."

Proceeds from the float will be used to pay off £21m of debt. But concerns centre on how the club will fund plans to abandon its St James' Park home for a new £90m stadium, replace stars such as David Ginola and Peter Beardsley, and develop a youth policy without asking shareholders for more money.

The continued role of Sir John Hall in the running of the club has also raised eyebrows. Sir John, whose Cameron Hall property company will remain the majority shareholder after flotation, is stepping down from the main board but will remain chairman of the football club.

Despite the shaky state of stock markets, a spokeswoman for NatWest, brokers to the issue, insisted the flotation was going well. "The retail offer is going to be hugely oversubscribed," she said.

As Newcastle put the finishing touches to its flotation plans, Tottenham Hotspur announced a rise in operating profits before transfer fees of £1.1m (£6.3m) in the six months to January.

PowerGen takes full control of Kinetica

PowerGen, the privatised electricity generator, unexpectedly moved yesterday to take full control of Kinetica, its troubled gas joint venture with Conoco, which has been struggling under a burden of loss-making supply contracts, writes Chris Godsmark.

The news did not impress investors, coming on top of analysts' downgrades. PowerGen shares dropped 17p to 58.5p.

Conoco, part of the giant US DuPont chemical empire, said the parting had been "extremely amicable". PowerGen will not pay any cash to its partner but will spend £18m paying off Conoco's share of Kinetica's debts. Michael Harris, PowerGen's director of marketing, will take over responsibility for the gas business, and Kinetica's managing director, Norman Ellis, will leave the company.

The "take or pay" contracts to buy gas at inflated prices, am-

bled out when the market price of gas crashed in 1995 from 20p a therm to less than 10p. PowerGen also confirmed plans to make a 169m exceptional charge in its accounts this year.

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Company	Results
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Alright & Wilson (F)	657.8m (744.2m) 62.5m (55m) 12.5p (12.3p) 6.5p (5.5p)
APV (F)	7

business

MPs warn on cost of power shake-up

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

A cross-party Commons committee yesterday warned the electricity regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild, not to rule out delaying next year's planned introduction of domestic power competition.

In a damning report, MPs on the Trade and Industry Select Committee also cast serious doubt on whether the costs of introducing competition, a complex process involving the construction of a plethora of new computer networks, could outweigh the benefits. It said the Government should step in to make an independent assessment of the costs involved as a matter of urgency.

Martin O'Neill, the Labour committee chairman, urged the industry to consider a short delay to the timetable set by Professor Littlechild if they could not guarantee an orderly move

towards residential choice. The plans envisage competition extending to 25 million households between April and September 1998 in four phases.

It'll be a damn close thing if it works on time. The problem is that if you give the electricity companies more time to implement competition, they will undoubtedly take it," said Mr O'Neill.

Senior industry figures and consumer groups have repeatedly warned that some electricity companies will fail to meet the timetable, blaming lack of co-ordination between the regulator, the Government and the businesses themselves.

The 12 regional electricity companies (RECs) in England and Wales, along with Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric, have been spending hundreds of millions of pounds on complex computer systems which can track customers as they change supplier.

The report said that the problem of building new metering systems had still not been fully appreciated by the Electricity Pool, the body which runs the wholesale power market.

It said Professor Littlechild should urgently carry out a consultation exercise with the industry and consumer bodies and report on which companies were the most likely to fail to meet the target. One suggestion is that Ofgem, the regulator's watchdog department, should consider fining companies who do not carry out proper tests of systems in the run-up to next April.

The most damaging charge is that the whole process, which only affects the 6 per cent of household bills, may not be worth it in the first place. Ofgem estimated it would cost the industry £10m. The report said not one of the companies believed this was realistic, with many experts quoting a figure of £500m.



Short-circuit: Martin O'Neill, the committee chairman, is worried that competition plans may come to grief

Courtaulds bullish despite profit slump

Magnus Grimond

Courtaulds Textiles, whose former chief executive, Noel Jervis, was forced out last June, said the reorganisation programme unveiled in September was moving faster than expected and within budget.

Exceptional costs of £31.7m effectively wiped out profits for last year, but the group said profits had grown in the latter six months of the year.

Reflecting its confidence in the outlook, the board is maintaining the final dividend at 10.1p, making an unchanged total of 15.3p for the year.

Colin Dyer, the new chief executive, said: "Trading in 1997 has continued the pattern of last year's second half with encouraging progress, particularly

in the UK and USA. At this early stage of the year, we are meeting our targets."

The company said the annual benefits of the restructuring would build to between £10m and £13m by 1998, with only a couple of million pounds coming through in the current year. With eight businesses sold since June, most of the planned disposals have been made and further exceptional costs will be limited to between £3m to £4m, the company said.

After last year's charges, pretax profits slumped from £36.5m to £40.000 in the year to December. Even stripping out the exceptional costs they slipped from £40.4m to £32.1m, which the company blamed on a drop in first half profits from US lace and stretch fabrics.

This will start in October with order-driven trading in the FTSE 100 stocks.

The Treasury Committee's report, its fifth into the Exchange, concludes: "We can see no reason why the Stock Exchange should now not develop a corporate structure."

MPs believe that it will only push full ahead with the introduction of a American-style order-driven share trading which the whole of the stock market is represented on the Exchange.

At the moment the Exchange's board is still dominated by London market-making and broking firms, which stand to lose the most when the City sheds its traditional quote-driven share trading system. This will start in October with

ing this October ... So although we always keep these things under review, we wouldn't be expecting to be making any other major changes this year."

The spokesperson also drew attention to part of the MP's report which conceded: "There is no 'right' answer about the most appropriate ownership structure to yield the optimal market, regulatory and public interest outcome." As for next year or later, the spokesperson said: "We have nothing further to say at the moment."

The impending upheaval in the way the City trades shares follows close on the introduction of *Crest*, the automated share settlement system.

John Willcock

The Commons Treasury Committee urged the London Stock Exchange yesterday to ditch its co-operative ownership structure in favour of floating as a company.

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Dettori doubles as Tote's fresh face

Racing

GREG WOOD
reports from Doncaster

For those with an eye for the inevitable, Doncaster was a rewarding place to be yesterday as Frankie Dettori strode confidently towards centre stage on the first day of the Flat season and picked up the script pretty much where he had left off four months ago. His first ride curtain in Britain this year was a winner — and one of the easiest he has sat on this side of Christmas. So was his second, in the richest race on the card, while away from the track, the Italian was revealed as the cheery new face of the Tote.

It is not so long since the thought of a jockey, for whom punting is firmly forbidden, signing up to promote a betting organisation would have raised the collective blood pressure at Portman Square to dangerous levels. These are more realistic times, however, and the man whose face and personality have become almost synonymous with the sport will soon grace a thousand posters attempting to persuade punters not to blow their cash at the bookies, but to blow it with the Tote instead.

"The Tote decided to use my face, I don't know why," Dettori said, false modesty being one of the few things he does not do well. "The good thing about the Tote is that all the profit goes back into racing, so the whole purpose is to get people to bet on the Tote, so we can create huge jackpots and a good winning fee for a horse owner."

That, of course, is something Dettori knows all about, and the Dettoris had cause to return by mid-afternoon. Mirren and his ride in the 16-furlong handicap, cantered home

lithony Strand, Sheikh Mohammed's racing manager, said afterwards, "We'll just have to see what there is for him." A minor Group Three event in France apparently beckons.

Dettori's rapid double was rendered at odds of almost 24-1, so his latest employers must have been grateful for then built-in profit margin. Just as relieved were Doncaster's administrators, since with attention focused squarely on Dettori, little time remained for the navel-gazing which has become a tedious opening-day tradition. The first turf meeting of the year will never be more than a minor diversion between Cheltenham and Aintree, just as the early stages of the National Hunt campaign go unnoticed amid the high-simmer Flat festivals.

None the less, John Sander son, Doncaster's clerk of the course, was sufficiently sensitive to the criticism which always comes his way at the time of the year to float two possible solutions. The first, to move the Lincoln meeting beyond the Aintree festival, is hardly original and suffers from enormous practical drawbacks.

The second, more intriguing, idea involved extending the Flat turf season through the winter, with a nominal — and easily forgettable — starting date for the new season immediately after the November Handicap meeting, also at Doncaster. The Levy might also benefit, since punters appear to show a slight preference for Flat racing on grass. At present, though, this is little more than a vague suggestion in BHB discussion documents, and the best hope for an end to the ritual moaning may be that everyone will simply get bored with it.

"The Tote decided to use my face, I don't know why," Dettori said, false modesty being one of the few things he does not do well.

First Island, the winner of the Mile 12 months ago, went on to win the Sussex Stakes at Goodwood, but while Canyon Creek, with just two races behind him, is undoubtedly a horse of promise, it is hard to imagine him making similar progress.

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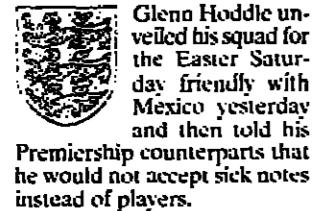
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sport

Hoddle to adopt hard line over absenteeism

GLENN MOORE



Glenn Hoddle unveiled his squad for the Easter Saturday friendly with Mexico yesterday and then told his Premiership counterparts that he would not accept sick notes instead of players.

Seven of those chosen are already said to be doubtful and, with the business end of the season approaching, managers will be looking to make withdrawals. Hoddle appears to have decided it is time to make a stand.

"If a player is injured and can't play, we will have him report and our medical staff will take a look at him," Hoddle said. "If they're playing for their club and someone says they are not fit for us, it is only fair we should have a look."

"I wouldn't like to think managers are pulling their players out for any reason other than injury. You gain so much from playing for your country."

Teddy Sheringham, Tony Adams, David Beckham, Gary Neville, Darren Anderton, Matt Le Tissier and Gareth Southgate are all said to be carrying injuries. Already ruled out are

Paul Merson, Andy Hinchliffe, Alan Shearer, Les Ferdinand and Paul Gascoigne.

This skirmish could be the prelude to a major row. England's crucial World Cup tie in Poland is three days after the European Cup final on 28 May. That could feature Manchester United but, in theory, Hoddle can demand their England players are released to him on 26 May. "It is not something which will be talked about until it becomes reality," Hoddle said. "If the problem is there, it would be a nice problem to have and I would consider with Alex Ferguson."

There were four United play-

ers in yesterday's 25-man squad including, for the first time, Nicky Butt, Gary Neville, Beckham and the recalled Gary Pallister.

Also recalled, after a four-year gap, are Martin Keown and Nigel Martyn. Missing, dropped for the first time since he came into the England side a decade ago, is Stuart Pearce. Another former captain, David Platt, is also absent despite recovering fitness.

Pearce was blamed by many for Gianfranco Zola's goal at Wembley last month but his dropping seems harsh. Nick Barmby and David James are in

far worse form and they have been retained.

Keown's return, at the age of 30, is an indication that Hoddle could have done with a man-mover against Italy. Through his game he has developed under both Bruce Rioch and Arsène Wenger, Keown's chief claim to distinction remains his impression of a human limpet. He was capped 11 times by Graham Taylor but ignored by Terry Venables.

Martyn's recall is also an international too late. As the Premiership's in-form goalkeeper, he should have been in last month's squad. He is unlikely to start but, if he does, he will find one notable difference between keeping goal for England and doing so for Leeds - England try to attack as well as defend.

Martyn is one of four goalkeepers, which seems extravagant for a home friendly, especially as the accepted No 1, David Seaman, is not included despite being fit enough for Arsenal to expect him to face Liverpool on Monday.

Butt, 22, steps up from captaining the Under-21 side. Since breaking into the Manchester United team in the wake of Paul Ince's departure, he has proved a successful foil to Roy Keane

and early indiscipline has given way to maturity without the loss of his combative ness.

Hoddle now has a busy few days on the telephone. As well as negotiating with managers, he intends to speak to Gascoigne, who appears to be going through one of his chequered periods.

"I will be speaking to him about his leg injury," said Hoddle, "and other matters may come up. I don't know the facts of what happened with him and I am not going to comment until I do." Walter Smith at Rangers will know the facts and I will speak to him when things

have calmed down. Sadly, one fears that Gascoigne's life will never calm down, at least not while it is worth an England coach retaining a professional interest in it.

ENGLAND SQUAD (friendly v Mexico, March 29): Glenn Hoddle (manager), Martin Keown, Gary Neville, David Beckham, Paul Merson, Alan Shearer, Southampton (Vic), Aston Villa (Steve), Manchester City (Graeme Souness), Manchester United (Bruce Rioch), Liverpool (John Barnes), Chelsea (John Terry), Birmingham City (Mike Thomas), Manchester United (David Venables), Redbridge (Leigh Bromby), West Ham (Steve), Chesterfield (Mike Duxbury), Le Mans (Mike Duxbury), Southampton (Mike Duxbury), Watford (Steve Cotterill).

■ Sky TV have secured the rights to screen England's final World Cup qualifying match against Italy in Rome on 11 October.

Neville has faith in fast learners

GLENN MOORE

There were no champagne corks popping in Manchester United's dressing-room on Wednesday night, nor on the flight back from Oporto after their 4-0 aggregate win. The mood was one of satisfaction rather than celebration. A European Cup semi-final with Borussia Dortmund, and a domestic championship campaign, were already on the minds of players and manager.

Gary Neville, who was excellent in Wednesday's goalless draw with Porto, despite carrying an ankle injury, said: "There was no jubilation afterwards. We were expected to go through and if we had not we could not have forgiven ourselves."

"Now it is the semi-finals and the Germans again. It is about time we beat them. They have some great players with experience of world and European finals and we will have to be at our best. As a young kid growing up I have only ever seen German teams dominating competitions. This team is learning all the time. We have experience in the right areas and we have a lot of young legs. We are also a quick team and that is the most important factor in European football."

"We can be as good as anyone and we will be as good as Juventus by the end of this

season or the next. I am sick of hearing that these teams are better than us. Bobby Robson made the Porto players out to be something from a different planet."

Who plays host in the semi-final first leg on 9 April will be determined noon today in Lausanne. The second leg a fortnight later has created a fixture problem for United. They were due to play Newcastle United on 25 April. That will have to be moved to either 16 April, giving Manchester United three games in eight days between the semi-final games, or 5 May, which would mean a championship run-in of four games in nine days. The European Cup final is in Munich on 28 May.

Already injuries are mounting, with Neville and David Beckham, now carrying ankle knocks to add to the hamstring and thigh problems of Ryan Giggs and Andy Cole.

There is another worry as far as Europe is concerned: suspension. Under Uefa's well-meaning but badly thought-out disciplinary system, a player could miss the final because of two yellow cards received within months apart. That is Gary Neville's fear.

He was booked in Turin in September, the first of seven United players to be cautioned in the eight games they have played - the best record of the



Red is the colour: Celebrating Manchester United fans light up Porto's ground on Wednesday

Photograph: Reuter

competition. A second booking would result in an automatic one-match suspension even if he has completed eight flawless matches between.

"It is a scandalous rule," said Neville, who missed the Euro '96 semi-final under the same totting-up procedure. "I have been walking a tightrope since Turin."

With the current strict interpretation of the laws this seems harsh. While foul play has to be discouraged, bookings should be regarded as spent after four

matches, rather like speeding convictions are spent after three years. Otherwise players are inhibited. Alex Ferguson, the United manager, attributed his team's tentative start in Oporto to players being wary of tackling until they had worked out the referee's approach.

Dortmund, who have received 14 yellow cards in their campaign, including one red, will be missing Matthias Sammer in the semi-final first-leg. He, though, has been booked in two of his last three games and

is repeat of last year's final. It took penalties to separate Juventus and Ajax then and it could do

so again. Juventus are favourites but Ajax showed in winning 3-2 after extra time at Atletico Madrid that the continuing break-up of their successful 1995 team has not dimmed their desire.

This is the sixth successive season in which an Italian side has made the last four of this competition. While Manchester United's achievement is substantial, the English game as a whole cannot crow about its quality until it approaches that record.

If the eventual runners-up, Woking, had won the Conference, Torquay would have been relegated from the Third Division. Stevenage won the Conference but, because their ground did not meet Football League standards by the 31 December 1995 deadline, they were not promoted and Torquay were saved.

The disciplinary panel has

unlimited powers to punish Stevenage and could levy either a heavy fine, deduct points or even bar the club from promotion over a number of years if they are found guilty. However, the panel failed to reach a

decision.

The future of the GM Vauxhall Conference champions, Stevenage, was left up in the air yesterday after a Football Association disciplinary panel failed to reach a verdict over allegations that the club asked for a £30,000 "bung" from Torquay.

The Stevenage chairman, Victor Green, allegedly told Torquay that unless the money was paid he would sell his club's star striker, Barry Hayles, which would have reduced their chances of winning Conference.

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decision.

The former Swedish international Robert Frytz has a return to Scottish football with Kilmarnock on a short-term contract. The 37-year-old mid-fielder, who has been released by Malmö, first played in Scotland more than a decade ago at Rangers, when he teamed up with Bobby Williamson, now his manager at Kilmarnock.

Niklas Gudmundsson, Blackburn Rovers' Swedish forward, has joined Ipswich Town on loan for at least a month.

Woking keep watch

Non-League notebook

RUPERT METCALF

Woking may have enjoyed their role as underdogs when they took Coventry City to a replay in the third round of this season's FA Cup, but tomorrow they will be the favourites as they attempt to stop an Essex village team claiming another giant-killing scalp.

The Surrey side head for Scratley Road, the humble home of Heybridge Swifts, for a quarter-final tie against the Essex League team who thrashed another leading GM Vauxhall Conference club, Kidderminster Harriers, 3-0 in the last round.

"We certainly won't be underestimating Heybridge," said Geoff Chapple, Woking's manager, who admitted that his

side were "not in the best of form at the moment." He hopes to be able to recall the former Wimbledon goalkeeper, Hans Segers, who played in Woking's 3-2 win at Dorking in the last round but has been on holiday since the inconclusive end of his trial on match-fixing charges.

Woking are one of only two Conference sides left in the trophy. Stevenage Borough entertain Colwyn Bay, the Welshmen who are one of three UniBond League clubs to reach the last eight. Ashton United visit Dagenham & Redbridge while Bishop Auckland are at home to Gloucester City.

Bishop Auckland's place in the quarter-finals was not secure until the Football Association rejected Altrincham's protest about the conduct of the Bishops' fans and players at Altrincham in the last round.

They'll be coming down the mountain when they come

Netherlands

Dani, the Portuguese forward who played nine games for West Ham last season, is remembered at Upton Park more for his fondness for London's nightclubs than his playing prowess. Yesterday, though, the 20-year-old was the toast of Amsterdam after his spectacular goal helped Ajax reach the European Cup semi-finals.

Dani crashed a superb long-range shot into the top corner of the Atletico Madrid net to give Jesus Gil y Gil, Atletico's president, a taste of defeat. Before the first leg in the Netherlands, he had said about Ajax: "You see them warming up, five blacks there, four there, three more on the field - it looks like the Congo to me." His comments led to Ajax board members boycotting a lunch with Atletico officials prior to the second leg.

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Lambert knack
Nicholas Harling on the rise of the Dortmunder Scot, page 26

sport

FRIDAY 21 MARCH 1997 - THE INDEPENDENT

Head hunter at work
David Llewellyn on the new mover and shaker at Sussex, page 27

Juninho's genius inspiring Boro revival

Football

Juninho believes Middlesbrough can secure Premiership survival and some glory at Wembley by playing the fantasy football that Bryan Robson has spent millions trying to bring to the Riverside.

The 22-year-old Brazilian readily admits that he is again in the sort of form which prompted the Middlesbrough player-manager to pay São Paulo £4.75m for his skills almost 18 months ago.

But after capping a performance of pure brilliance by

scoring his third goal in four games - and 11th of the season - in the 2-1 victory over Blackburn, Juninho insists that the team that cost around £30m is now ready to give the Teesside fans value for money.

"I am now playing as well as I ever did in Brazil, but I think that is because I have found my best position," said Juninho, who has maintained a golden silence and consistent form while his fellow Brazilian Emerson has produced a catalogue of disappearing acts and the £42,000-a-week Italian, Fabrizio Ravanelli, has complained about his situation in the media.

"But it has not just been me. The whole team has been playing well in the last three months and if we keep playing the same way then we have a great chance of staying up," Juninho added.

"There was a time when players would be injured or ill and we would play a different formation in every game.

"When things weren't going well we would concede an early goal and it would be very difficult to get a result.

"Now we are defending well and that helps players like me at the other end to concentrate on creating chances and scoring goals."

It's a theme taken up by Boro's assistant manager, Viv Anderson, who saw his team lift themselves off the foot of the table with their third successive Premiership win at the beginning of a five-day stint that also brings Chelsea and Nottingham Forest to the Riverside.

"Juninho has learnt about the game here and the language," Anderson said. "It's all about him getting that experience of England.

"And of course the fact that the players are getting used to him now is another factor. But although Juninho has been playing well, the whole team has

been excellent since Christmas and the only slip up was when we played poorly at Sheffield Wednesday.

"Nigel Pearson has come back from injury and Gianluca Festa has settled in very well and that has given stability at the back."

Juninho broke Rovers' resistance just before the break with a polished finish following an intricate Boro move and set up Ravanelli for his 26th goal of the season on the hour.

Substitute Chris Sutton halved the arrears with 22 minutes still remaining, but with Juninho in command there

were no late worries for a near-30,000 crowd.

Middlesbrough's relegation fight could be eased even more if the Football Association quashes the three-point penalty imposed for their no-show at Ewood Park in December when illness and injury left Robson with a decimated squad.

The Boro appeal will be heard next Wednesday and, if George Carmen QC wins the case, then the Riverside legions will be able to start enjoying what, despite the struggle in the Premiership, is the club's most successful season in their 121-year history.

"I am looking forward to

playing at Wembley again," the Brazilian said with a relish that would have sent a shiver through Leicester, who were victims of his South American skills on Saturday.

"I hope we will win, of course, and if we play like we have been doing then we will have a good chance."

For Blackburn, the only consolation from the game was the return of Santon, who nudged ahead of Kevin Gallacher as the club's leading scorer with his 12th of the season just 15 minutes after coming off the bench following a four-game absence through injury.

As the Flat racing season got under way yesterday, Britain's oldest horse race took place 40 miles away. Sadly, it ended with the winner's untimely death

Report by Jon Culley

For the majority of the racing world, yesterday marked the start of the Flat season, traditionally launched with the Lincoln meeting at Doncaster. To a small section of the equine community, however, gathered 40 miles away in a hilltop in the Yorkshire wolds, it was Derby day.

It was not an occasion likely to have been much discussed in Epsom, even though the Kiplingcotes Derby claims to have stolen the march historically on the midsummer Classic by more than 250 years. A first prize of £50 falls some way short of the riches on offer on the Downs in June, yet competition is no less intense. Sadly, yesterday's winning horse paid the ultimate price, collapsing from a heart attack a few strides past the winning post.

It would have been a glorious finish, but for its tragic aftermath

with Sunny, a nine-year-old mare, finishing a length ahead of Memorable before collapsing under his rider, Sheila Ashby. Sunny, again ridden by Ashby, won the race last year. "The race went so easily," Ashby, who runs a trekking centre near Thirsk, said tearfully. "But her heart has just given out."

Sunny's death also nullified Ken Holmes' indignation. Holmes, a horse dentist from Selby, found his attempt to repeat his 1995 success on Memorable, the 41-year-old former accountant whose home at Ebor railway station adjoins the course, had not ridden any horse before he bought the six-year-old gelding for £1,000 in January.

He was raising money for Kingston General hospital in Hull, where his wife has been treated for skin cancer. Lyz Turner, news editor of the *Holderness Gazette*, was third on five-year-old Indy.

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The race is run over a gru-

elling four-and-a-half miles above Market Weighton on the third Thursday of March. It is said to have been taking place since 1519. This, the organisers say, makes it the oldest horse race in Britain, although the evidence is largely anecdotal.

Like the Epsom contest, which started in 1779, it was instigated at the fancy of nobility, who wanted to measure how well their horses had wintered. Eventually, 49 of them subscribed. Guy Stevenson, one of the present-day trustees, has a yellowing document which shows a £30 dona-

tion from the Earl of Burlington, along with contributions from others ranging from £5 to £20, adding up to £365. It formed an investment handed down through generations of trustees to provide the annual prize.

Nobility are thin on the ground these days, although Lord Manton was, until recently, a trustee. The race is open to all-comers, the only stipulation being that they turn up before 11 o'clock on the morning of the race to weigh in. A set of coal merchant's scales is provided. Each rider pays £4.25

to take part and none must weigh more than 10 stone.

"People participate because it is a local tradition nowadays," said Sue Hillaby, the clerk of the course, who presented a ruddy rural face above a sensible country coat, only to reveal herself as a bank cashier from Hull. "This is just a one-day-a-year thing for me, but the clerk's job has been in my family for four generations and I like to maintain the tradition."

Hillaby sees that no one slips in under weight before reading the rules of conduct to the rid-

ers and despatching them on the half-hour walk to the start. Spectators pay nothing to watch, although there are no facilities.

Yesterday's turnout was conservatively estimated at 200, most of whom stood in groups along the former Roman road off the A163 that forms the fir-

ishing straight, with no apparent regard for safety. There were no barriers. Advice passed by word of mouth was that should three or more runners be upsides when they appear in the distance, then diving through the nearest hedge should be considered.

Racing, page 25

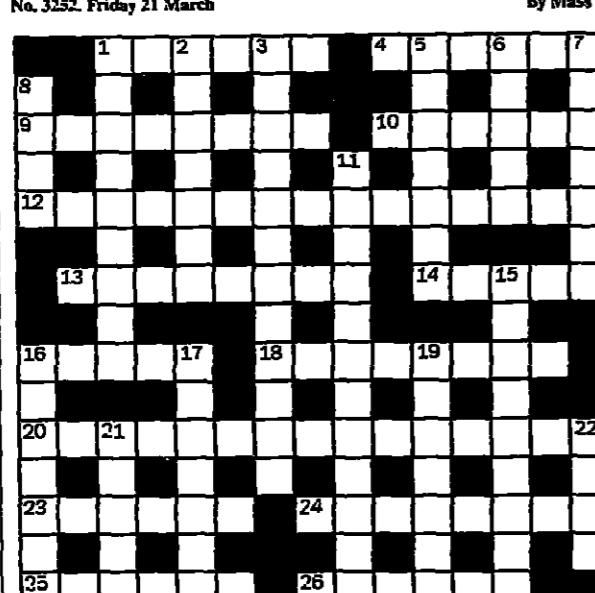


The leading pack approach a hill in the Kiplingcotes Derby yesterday, with Sunny (third from right) near the front

Photograph: David Ashdown

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3252, Friday 21 March By Mass



ACROSS

1. Splashes about river for fishes (6)
4. Absolute upright Queen (6)
9. Runners in soft soles (8)
10. Burns spruce, last of logs (6)
12. Scedy earth? Hunt weeder out (5,3,7)
13. Indulging? Just the opposite, without energy (8)
14. Voiced tribute for security measures? (5)
16. Conditions for getting on in Civil Service (5)
18. Caller's no time to talk in the dark (8)
20. Anti-Freud? (6-8)
23. One reportedly secures living quarters (6)
24. Extension courses in Latin I do (8)
25. Grounds for pardon (6)
26. Gandy family in Southern State (6)

DOWN

1. Mushroom, round strong climbing plant (9)
2. About to sharpen up stories (7)
3. Exponents of light choral works? (3,7)
5. Strike a blow for rank (7)
6. Before onset of hurricane, whip up shelter (5)
7. Falls back on reserves (7)
8. Colour of pietrist (4)
11. Baton descends, introducing German work (7,5)
15. Hollow study, one against entering EC (9)
16. The Italian's settled in level part of Spain (7)
17. Sir's one for training Sixth Formers? (7)
19. Support us in a spot (7)
21. Note (small amount, we hear, for antique) (5)
22. Fish, one after lots of drink (4)

Thursday's Solution

NIRVANA SARCIASM
EUMLERNEIMI
MESSAGEPARLOURS
ESRNARASD
SHINYACETYLENE
IALDOD
SUNFLOWER DREAD
DRRIE
DRESS LUMAATER
PURAAE
GATESGIRL GORGEE
PEESIOLCI
INTERCOLLEGiate
STGMAUD
EXEGEETE CLEMENT

Fixture proposals raise fears of burn-out

Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWITT

The poor bloody infantry of

English rugby will blanch at the prospect, but next season's programme of domestic, cross-border and international competition is the most brutally relentless ever devised. As things stand, the 1997-98 campaign will virtually mirror soccer's model by beginning on 16 August and dragging on until the last week in May.

Those with the well-being of the players, rather than the rude health of club bank accounts, at heart will be aghast. Jack Rowell, the England coach, has already identified fixture congestion as his biggest single problem in preparing the national team for Test matches while Phil de Giaville, his captain, said only a week ago that leading performers were at risk from "burn-out".

Next season's fixture list, including as it does 22 Courage League games, up to 11 Heineken Cup matches, a maximum of five Viking Cup ties and eight England international dates with a nice, relaxing summer tour of New Zealand lagged on the end, will drive players to the edge of exhaustion. Test regulars will be in serious dan-

ger of playing twice as much rugby as their counterparts in New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, many of whom get away with 30 games a year or less.

Representatives of the First Division clubs have returned the first draft of the fixture list to the planners with "Think Again" stamped all over it. One senior club official described the programme as "arse backwards", saying: "We have three League games in August and then have to wait until the end of December for the fourth, which is crazy. There is no point in block-booking the whole of September and October for European rugby because it leaves those who are not involved with a vast hole to fill. The European matches should be threaded through the season, as they are in football."

Disagreements over Europe are about to become as fractious in rugby as they are among the Tories. English and French clubs are increasingly concerned at what they describe as a "Celtic agenda" aimed at expanding the Heineken Cup into a season-long European league - a move that would revolutionise domestic competition in Ireland, Scotland and Wales but dominate the much stronger national league structures operating in the two stronger countries. The

debate will come to a head in Dublin on Wednesday when European Rugby Cup Ltd holds a meeting to analyse the pluses and minuses of this season's tournament and considers ways of developing it in the medium and long terms. Peter Wheeler, the Leicester chief executive, has been mandated by the English clubs to take a hard line on future expansion plans.

"We feel the tail is wagging the dog here," one English lobby insider said. "The English and French clubs are the big attractions, yet they find themselves outvoted time and again. Meetings have taken place at various levels between club officials from the two countries and if our domestic league competitions come under threat, the repercussions could be very serious."

At least England, Scotland and Ireland have been spared extra international commitments in the run-up to the 1999 World Cup. Fears that they would have to play off against each other to decide seedings were allayed yesterday when Leo Williams, the competition chairman, announced that all three countries had agreed to draw lots.

Mike Catt, the England out-

APRIL OFFERS

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• Additional nights £30
• Heathrow, Manchester & regionals*

PARIS £121 Sovereign

• 1 night B&B
• ** Grand Hotel de Paris
• Additional nights £20
• Eurostar from Waterloo*

PRAGUE £245 Sovereign

• 2 nights B&B
• ★★★ Julian
• Additional nights £29
• Heathrow, Stansted & Manchester*

BARCELONA £209 Sovereign

• 2 nights B&B
• ** Santmaria
• Additional nights £20
• Heathrow, Birmingham & Manchester*

MADRID £169 Sovereign

• 2 nights B&B
• ★★ Cliper
• Additional nights £20
• Gatwick, Manchester*, Heathrow*, Glasgow*

SEVILLE £215 Sovereign

• 2 nights B&B
• ★ Albi
• Additional nights £19
• Heathrow & Manchester*

* All prices do NOT include airport taxes. All hotels are centrally located and have en-suite bathrooms

* Some airports require a supplement

** Prices per person based upon 2 sharing a room.

ALL OFFERS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

For reservations phone Mon to Fri 09.00 to 18.00

0181-960 9066

CITY TRAVELLER DIRECT LTD